Calvary

By

Octave Mirbeau

rnia

ANNE DILLON

THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

GIFT OF
Mrs. Helen A. Dillon

Mirbeau. This is what he says:

"He is a literary explorer. . . The rare charm of tenderness is his. . . In his novels we find strong, violent strokes, an extreme irony; but his pages are filled with an emotion which avows, as if regretfully, the nobility and lofty desires of a soul imprisoned in the reserve of its youth."

And another critic thus paints him:

"A masterly and vigorous writer, gifted with an extraordinary power of expression, an enthusiast, an unexampled evoker of nature, stirred by the physical sensations which human beings and inanimate things give him, equally capable of lifting us to a world of poetry or of hurling us into abysmal depths; always a man of the first water, battling against all the spectres of life; and

"CALVARY" can be called a masterpiece without exaggeration. In its remarkable pages, Octave Mirbeau, who has been characterized as "the Don Juan of the Ideal," pours the tumultuous passion of a Byronically sensitive soul. It is filled with pity, it trembles with poetry and is extraordinary by reason of its wave of sublime eloquence. Yet it is a simple story, the story of a love for a wilful woman, but the striking character which distinguishes it lies in the clear, unmatched impressions of the love.

Jean Mintie, the hero, is an analyst of the soul who cannot experience an action without dissecting it, a man of feeling who recklessly surrenders himself to his love, at once frenzied and intelligent; a man neither foolish nor an imbecile, who yet permits himself to be dragged to the depths of vice and crime for his sweetheart. The description of Mintie's reaction to war is masterly in its realism.

The book has undeniable charm—a powerful, sweeping narrative. It is the record of a man crucified by his love.

CALVARY

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/calvaryanovel00mirbiala

CALVARY

(A Novel)

By Octave Mirbeau

Member of the Goncourt Academy

Translated by Louis Rich

New York

Lieber & Lewis

MCMXXII

COPYRIGHT, 1922,
BY LIEBER & LEWIS

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

College
Library
PQ
2364
M7C13E

CALVARY

1061185

CHAPTER I

I WAS born one evening in October at Saint-Michel-les-Hêtres, a small town in the department of Orne, and I was immediately christened by the name of Jean-François-Marie-Mintié. To celebrate in a fitting manner my coming into this world, my godfather, who was my uncle, distributed a lot of dainties, threw many coppers and other small coins to a crowd of country boys gathered on the church steps. One of them, while struggling with his comrades, fell so awkwardly on the sharp edge of a stone that he broke his neck and died the following day. As for my uncle, when he returned home he contracted typhoid fever and passed away a few weeks later. My governess, old Marie, often related these incidents to me with pride and admiration.

Saint-Michel-les-Hêtres is situated on the outskirts of a great national forest, the Tourouvre forest. Although it counts fifteen hundred inhabitants, it makes no more noise than is made in the fields on a calm day by the trees, the grass, the corn. A grove of giant beech trees, which turn purple in autumn, shields it from the northern winds, and the houses with pentile roofs, descending the declivity of the hill, extend far out until they meet the great valley, broad and always green, where one can see straying herds of oxen. The Huisne River, glittering under the sun, winds and loses itself in the meadows which are separated by rows of tall poplars. Dilapidated tanneries, small windmills scale its course, clearly visible among clumps of alders. On the other side of the valley are cultivated fields with straight lines of fences and apple trees

scattered here and there. The horizon is enlivened by small pink farms, by hamlets one can see here and there in the midst of the verdure which appears almost black. Because of the proximity of the woods, the sky is alive with crows and yellow-beaked jackdaws coming and going at all seasons.

Our family lived on the outskirts of the town, opposite a church, very old and tottering, an ancient and curious structure which was called the Priory — an annex of an Abbey which was destroyed during the Revolution and of which were left not more than two or three faces of a crumbled wall covered with ivy. I recall clearly but without tenderness the smallest details of the places where my childhood was spent. I recall the iron gate in a neglected condition which opened with a creaking sound into a large court adorned by a scurfy grass plot, two shabby looking sorbs visited by blackbirds, some chestnut trees, very old and with such large trunks that the arms of four men could not reach around them — my father used to tell this with pride to every visitor. I recall the house with its brick walls, grim and crusty; its semicircular steps beautified by geraniums; its irregular windows which looked like holes; its roof, very steep, ending in a weather-cock, which in a breeze made a sound like an owl. Behind the house, I remember, was a basin where muddy wake-robins were bathing or small carps with white scales were playing. I recall the sombre curtain of fir trees which hid the commons from view, the back yard, the study which my father built on the edge of the road skirting the property in such a manner that the coming and going of clients and clerks did not disturb the quiet of the household. I recall the park, its enormous trees, strangely twisted, eaten up by polypes and moss, joined together by tangled lianas, and the alleys never raked, where worn-

out stone benches rose up here and there like ancient tombs. And I also remember myself, a sickly child, in a smock frock of lustring, running across this gloom of forsaken things, lacerating myself in the blackberry bush, torturing the animals in the backyard or for entire days sitting in the kitchen and watching Felix who served as our gardener, valet, and coachman.

Years and years have passed. Everything that I loved is now dead. Everything that I knew has taken on a new appearance. The church has been rebuilt. It now has an embellished doorway, arched windows, fancy gutter-spouts representing flaming mouths of demons; its new brick belfry laughs gaily into the blue; in place of the old house there now rises an elaborate Swiss cottage built by the new proprietor who, in the enclosure, has increased the number of colored glass balls, small cascades and plaster statues of Love, soiled by rain. But things and people are engraved so profoundly upon my memory that time could not apply a burnisher hard enough to erase them.

I want, from now on, to speak of my parents not as I knew them when I was a child, but such as they would appear to me now, completed by memory, humanized, so to speak, by intimacy and revelation, in all the crudity of life, in all the immediacy of impression which the inexorable experiences of life lend to persons too unhesitatingly loved and too closely known.

My father was a notary public. Since time immemorial it had been so with the Mintié family. It would have appeared monstrous, almost revolutionary, if a member of the Mintié family had dared to break this family tradition and had renounced the scutcheons of gilt wood which were transmitted religiously from one generation to another like some title of nobility. At Saint-Michel-les-Hêtres and the surrounding coun-

try, my father occupied a position which ancestral pride, his dignified manners of a country gentleman, and, above all, his income of twenty thousand francs rendered very important, almost unshakeable. Mayor of Saint-Michel, member of the general council, acting justice of the peace, vice president of the agricultural commission, member of numerous agronomic and forestry societies, he did not overlook any of the petty or ambitious honors which carry with them a sort of prestige and influence. He was an excellent man, very honest and very gentle,—with a mania for killing. He could not see a bird, a cat, an insect — anything at all that was alive — without being seized with a strange desire to kill it. He waged a relentless trapper's war on blackbirds, goldfinches, chaffinches and bullfinches. Felix was instructed to let my father know as soon as a bird appeared in our garden, and my father would leave everything — clients, business, his meal — to kill the bird. He would often lie in wait for hours, motionless, behind a tree on which the gardener had pointed out a little blueheaded titmouse. During his walks, every time he noticed a bird on a branch and did not have his rifle with him, he would throw his cane at it, never failing to say, "Oh, hang it! He was there this morning!" or "Hang it! I must have missed him for sure, it's too far." These were the only thoughts which birds ever inspired in him.

He was also greatly engrossed with cats. Whenever he recognized the trail of a cat he could not rest until he discovered and killed it. Sometimes on a moonlight night he would get up, go out with his gun and stay outside till dawn. You should have seen him, musket on shoulder, holding by the tail the cadaver of a cat, bleeding and motionless! Never have I admired anything so heroic; and David on killing

Goliath must have had no more intoxicated an air of triumph! With a majestic gesture he threw the cat at the feet of the cook who said, "Oh! the nasty beast!" and thereupon started to cut it up, saving the meat for the beggars, leaving the skin to dry on the end of a stick, later to be sold at Auvergnats. If I dwell so much on details of a seemingly unimportant character, it is because during all my life I was obsessed with and haunted by these feline episodes of my childhood. There is one among them which has left such an impression on my spirit that to this very day, in spite of all the years that have gone by and all the sorrows that I have experienced, not a day passes without my thinking of it sadly.

One afternoon father and I were walking in the garden. My father carried a long stick ending in an iron skewer, by means of which he unearthed snails and limaxes that were eating up the plants. Suddenly on the edge of the basin we noticed a little kitten drinking. We hid behind a thick shrub.

"Child," my father said in a low voice, "go quickly, fetch my musket and come back. Be careful the cat does not see you."

And squatting down, he moved apart the twigs of the shrub so that he might observe every movement of the kitten which, resting on its forelegs, its neck drawn out and wagging its tail, was lapping the water in the basin and turning its head from time to time to lick its mouth and scratch its neck.

"Come on," repeated my father, "be off!" I pitied the little kitten. It was so pretty with its tawny fur striped with silky black, its supple and graceful movements and its tongue, like the petal of a rose, which pumped water! I would have liked to disobey my father, I even thought of making a noise, I wanted to cough, to brush the twigs apart rudely in order to

warn the poor animal of the danger ahead. But my father looked at me with eyes so severe that I walked away in the direction of the house. Pretty soon I came back with the musket. The kitten was still there, confident and gay. It had finished drinking. Sitting on its back, its ears pricked up and eyes shining, it was following the flight of a butterfly in the air. Oh, what a moment of unspeakable anguish that was for me! My heart was beating so powerfully that I feared I was going to faint.

"Papa! Papa!" I shouted. At the same time a sharp report was heard, which sounded like the crack of a whip.

"Damned rascal!" my father swore.

He aimed again. I saw his finger pull the trigger; quickly I shut my eyes and stopped my ears. Bang!! ....and I heard a mewing, at first plaintive and then sorrowful, oh, so sorrowful that one might have said it was the cry of a child. And the little kitten jumped, writhed, pawed the grass and did not stir any more.

Of an absolutely mediocre mind, tender hearted, though he seemed indifferent to everything which did not appeal to his vanity or did not affect his professional interests, lavish of counsel, ready to render aid, conservative, of graceful carriage and gay, my father justly enjoyed the respect of everybody. My mother, a young woman of the nobility, had brought no fortune with her as a dowry; instead, she had brought with her powerful connections, a closer alliance with the petty aristocracy of the country, which was considered just as useful as an increment in cash or an acquisition of land. Although his powers of observation were very limited and he did not boast of any ability to read souls as well as he could read a marriage contract or explain the legal points of a testament, my father very soon realized the difference of birth, edu-

cation and temperament which separated him from his wife.

Whether or not in the beginning he felt hurt on that score, I do not know; at any rate he never showed it. He resigned himself to it. Between him, who was rather awkward, ignorant and indifferent,—and her, who was educated, refined and emotional, there was a chasm which he never for a moment tried to bridge, having neither the desire nor the ability to do so. This moral situation of two beings united for all time, whom no community of thought and aspiration ever brought in close contact with each other, did not in the least trouble my father who considered himself satisfied if he found the house well managed, the meals well regulated, his habits and idiosyncrasies well respected. To my mother, on the other hand, this condition was very painful and made her heart heavy.

My mother was not beautiful, not even good looking, but there was so much simple dignity in her carriage, so much natural gracefulness in her movements, an expression of such broad kindness on her lips, somewhat pale, and in her eyes which by turns changed their color like the skies in April and shone like a sapphire, a smile so caressing, so sad, so humble, that one overlooked her forehead which was a little too high, swelling out under spots of hair irregularly planted, her nose all too large and her skin which was ash-colored and metal-like in appearance and which at times had an eruption of pimples on it. In her presence, as one of her old friends often told me, and as since then I sorrowfully realized myself, one felt at first slightly affected, then gradually carried away and finally violently possessed by a strange feeling of sympathy in which there was mingled a sort of affectionate respect, a vague desire, pity, and a longing to offer oneself as a sacrifice for her. Despite her physical

imperfections or rather because of these very imperfections, she possessed the sad and irresistible charm which is given to certain creatures privileged by misfortune, and around whom there floats an atmosphere of something irreparable. Her childhood and her early youth were periods of illness and were marked by some disquieting nervous fits. But it was hoped that marriage, in modifying the conditions of her existence, would restore her health which the physicians believed was suffering only from an excessive sensitiveness. It was not so at all. Marriage, on the contrary, only developed the morbid tendencies that were in her, and her sensitiveness was heightened to such a degree that, among other alarming symptoms, my poor mother could not stand the slightest odor, without being thrown into a fit, which always ended in a swoon. Of what did she suffer? Why these melancholic fits, these prostrations, which left her huddled up on the lounge for entire days, motionless and sullen like an old paralytic? Why these tears which would suddenly choke her throat to suffocation and for hours roll from her eyes in burning streams? Why this disgust with everything, which nothing could overcome: neither distractions nor prayers? She could not tell, for she herself did not know. . . Of the causes of her physical ailments, her mental tortures, her hallucinations which filled her heart and brains with a passionate desire to die, she knew nothing. She knew not why one evening as she sat in front of the glowing fireplace, she was suddenly seized with a horrible temptation to roll on the fire grate, to deliver her body over to the kisses of the flame which called her, fascinated her, sang to her hymns of unknown love. Nor did she know why on another day, while taking a stroll in the country and noticing a man walking in a half-mowed meadow with his scythe on the shoulder, she ran to-

wards him with outstretched arms, shouting "Death, O blessed death, take me, carry me away!" No, she knew not the cause or reason for all that. What she did know was that at such moments the image of her mother, her dead mother, was always before her, the image of her mother whom she herself, one Sunday morning, had found hanging from the chandelier in the parlor. And she again beheld the dead body which oscillated slowly in the air, she saw the face all black, the eyes all white and without pupils, she saw everything up to the sunbeam which, penetrating through the closed shutters, illuminated with a tragic light the tongue, stuck out, and the swollen lips. This anguish, these frenzies, this yearning for death, her mother had no doubt transmitted to her when she gave life to her; it is from her mother's side that she drew, it is from her mother's breast that she drank the poison, this poison which now filled her veins, with which her flesh was permeated, which fuddled her brain, which gnawed at her soul. During the intervals of calm which grew less frequent as the days, months and years passed by, she often thought of these things; and brooding over her life, recalling its remotest incidents and comparing the physical resemblances between the mother who died voluntarily and the daughter who wished to die, she felt more and more upon her the crushing weight of this lugubrious inheritance. She exalted in and completely abandoned herself to the idea that it was impossible for her to resist the fate of her ancestors who appeared to her as a long chain of suicides emerging from the depth of night, far in the past, and extending over ages to terminate ... where? At this question her eyes became troubled, her temples grew moist with a cold sweat and her hands gripped her throat as if striving to grasp the imaginary cord, the loop of which she felt was bruis-

ing her neck and choking her. Every object seemed to her an instrument of fatal death; everything reminded her of the image of death, decomposed and bleeding; the branches of the trees appeared to her as so many sinister gibbets, and in the green water of the fish pond, among the reeds and water lilies, in the river shaded by tall herbage, she distinguished the floating form covered with slime.

In the meantime my father, squatted behind some thick shrub, musket in hand, was watching a cat or bombarding some vocalizing warbler hidden in the branches. In the evening, by way of consolation he would gently say to mother, " Well, dearie, your health is not always good. You see, what you need is some bitters, take some bitters. A glass in the morning, a glass in the evening.... That's all that's needed." He did not complain of anything, he never got excited over anything. Seating himself at his desk, he would go over the papers which were brought to him by the city clerk during the day and sign them rapidly with an air of disdain. " Here! " he would exclaim, " it is just like this corrupt administration; it would do a whole lot better if it occupied itself with the farmer instead of pestering us with these small matters. . . . Here is some more silly stuff! " . . . Then he would go to bed, repeating in a calm voice: " Bitters, take some bitters."

This resignation hurt my mother like a reproach. Although my father's education was rather limited and though she did not find in him any trace of that masculine tenderness or fanciful romanticism of which she had dreamed, she nevertheless could not deny his physical energy and a sort of moral vigor which she envied in him, despising as she did its application to things which she considered petty and sordid. She felt guilty toward herself, guilty toward life so use-

lessly wasted in tears. Not only did she not meddle in the affairs of her husband, but little by little she lost her interest even in household duties, leaving them to the whims of the servants. She took so little care of herself that her chambermaid, good old Marie, who was present at her birth, often had to nurse and feed her, while scolding her affectionately, as one does a little infant in the cradle. In her desire for isolation she came to a point where she could no longer stand the presence of her parents, of her friends who, discomfited and repelled by her countenance more and more morose, by this mouth whence no word ever came, by this forced smile which was immediately shrivelled by an involuntary trembling of her lips,—called less and less frequently and ended by forgetting altogether the path leading to the Priory. Religion, like everything else, became a burden to her. She no longer put in an appearance in the church, did not pray any more, and two Easters passed without anyone seeing her approach the holy table.

Then my mother began to lock herself up in her room, the shutters of which she closed, and drew the curtains together, deepening the darkness about her. She used to spend entire days there, sometimes stretched out on a lounge, sometimes kneeling in a corner, her head touching the wall. And she was annoyed by the least noise from outside; the slamming of the door, the creaking of old shoes along the corridor, the neighing of a horse in the court came to disturb her novitiate of non-existence. Alas! What could be done about it! For a long time she had struggled against an unknown disease, and the disease, stronger than she was, had felled her to the ground. Now her will-power was paralyzed. She was no longer free to rise or act. Some mysterious force held her in chains, rendering her arms inert, her

brain muddled, her heart vacillating like a little smoky flame beaten by the wind; and far from resisting, she looked for added opportunities to plunge deeper into suffering, relishing with a sort of perverted exultation the frightful delights of her self-annihilation.

Dissatisfied with the management of his domestic affairs, my father at length decided to take an interest in the progress of my mother's illness, which passed his understanding. He had the hardest time in the world to make mother accept the idea of going to Paris to consult the "princes of science" as he put it. It was a sorry trip. Of the three celebrated physicians to whom he took her, the first declared that my mother was anæmic and prescribed a strengthening diet; the second diagnosed that she was affected with nervous rheumatism and prescribed a debilitating regimen; the third one found that "it was nothing" and recommended mental tranquility.

No one saw clearly into her soul. She herself did not know it. Obsessed with the cruel memory to which she attributed all her misfortunes, she could not unravel with clearness all that stirred obscurely in the innermost depths of her being, nor understand the vague passions, the imprisoned aspirations, the captive dreams which had accumulated in her since childhood. She was like a nestling bird that, without realizing the obscure and nostalgic forces which drew it toward heaven of which it has no knowledge, crushes its head and maims its wings against the cage bars. Instead of craving death as she thought she was, her soul within her, just like that bird that hungered for the unknown skies, hungered for life radiant with tenderness, filled with love; and just like that bird, was dying from this unassuaged hunger. As a child, she gave herself entirely, with all the exaggerations of her fervid nature, to the love for material

things and animals; as a young girl she was given to love of dreams of the impossible, but material objects never brought her peace, nor did her dreams assume a precise and soothing form. She had no one to guide her, no one to set right this youthful mind already shaken by internal shocks, no one to open the door of this heart to wholesome reality, a door already guarded by chimeric shadows in her vacant state; no one to whom she could pour out the exuberance of her thoughts, her tenderness, her desires, which finding no outlet for expansion, accumulated, boiled within her, ready to burst the fragile mould poorly protected by nerves too jaded.

Her mother, always ill, singularly absorbed in that hypochondria which was soon to kill her, was incapable of intelligent and firm direction in the matter of her daughter's education. Her father, all but ruined, put to his last shift, struggled hard to save for his family its ancestral home which was threatened; and among the young people about her — shiftless noblemen, vainglorious burghers, greedy peasants, none bore upon his brow the magic star which could lead her to her God. Everything she heard, everything she saw seemed to be in disagreement with her own manner of understanding and feeling. To her, the sun did not appear red enough, the nights pale enough, the skies deep enough. Her fleeting conception of things and beings condemned her fatally to a perversion of her senses, to vagaries of the spirit and left her nothing but the torment of an unachieved longing, the torture of unfulfilled desires. And later her marriage which had been more than a sacrifice — a business transaction, a compromise to improve the straitened circumstances of her father! . . . And her disgust, her revolt at feeling herself a piece of dishonored flesh, a prey, an instrument of man's pleasure! To have

soared so high and to fall so low! To have dreamed of celestial kisses, of mystic caresses and divine possessions and then . . . the end of it! . . . Instead of wide expanses, ablaze with light, where her imagination felt at home among the soaring flights of angels in a trance of joy and affrighted doves — there came night, thick, sinister and haunted by the spectre of her mother, stumbling over tombs and crosses with a piece of cord on her neck.

The Priory soon grew silent. On the gravel of its alleys one no longer heard the trundle of carts and carriages bringing friends of the neighborhood to the front entrance decorated with geraniums. The front gate was bolted in order to make the carriages go through the back yard. In the kitchen the servants talked among themselves in low voices, moving about on tiptoe as is done in a house where some one has died. The gardener, by order of my mother who could not stand the noise of wheelbarrows and the scraping of rakes on the ground, allowed the wild stock to suck up the sap of the rose bushes turned yellow, allowed the weeds to choke the flowers in the baskets and to cover up the walks. And the house with its dark curtain of fir trees resembling a funeral canopy which sheltered it from the west, with its windows always closed, with its living corpse which it guarded buried behind its square walls of old brick looked like a burial vault. The country folk who on Sunday used to take a stroll in the woods, no longer passed by the Priory without some sort of superstitious terror, as if that dwelling were an evil place haunted by ghosts. Pretty soon a legend grew about the place: a wood cutter told how one night, going back from work, he saw Madame Mintié all in white, her hair disheveled, crossing the sky high above and beating her chest with the crucifix.

My father locked himself up in his study more than ever, avoiding as much as possible staying in the house where he was hardly seen at times other than meal hours. He also took to making distant trips, increased the number of committees and societies over which he presided, found means to create for himself new distractions and business affairs far away from home. The Council General, the Agricultural Commission, the jury of the Court of Assizes were of great help to him for that purpose. When some one spoke to him of his wife he answered, shaking his head:

"Ah, I am very uneasy, very much wrought up over it. How will it end? I must confess I fear she may become insane....."

And when some one expressed his unbelief:

"No, no, I am not joking.... You know well that it runs in her family, their heads don't seem to be very strong!"

Nevertheless reproach never came from his lips, although he realized the embarrassing condition in which this situation placed his business affairs and which he ascribed to nothing but the irritating obduracy of my mother in not wanting to try anything that might cure her.

It was in these sad surroundings that I grew up. I came to this world a tiny, sickly child. What cares, what fierce tenderness, what deadly anguishes I brought with me! In the presence of the puny creature that I was, sustained by a breath of life so feeble that it could be guessed at only by a rattling sound in my throat, my mother forgot her own sorrows. Maternity revived her worn-out energy, awakened her conscience to new duties, to new sacred responsibilities which now devolved upon her. What ardent nights, what feverish days she spent bent over the cradle where lay something born of her own flesh and

soul, and palpitating! . . . Ah! yes! . . . I belonged to her, to her only; it was not at all of this conjugal submission that I was born; I was not the fatal consequence of the original sin as other children of men are; no! she had always carried me in her womb, and like Christ I was conceived in a long cry for love. All her troubles, her terrors, her past sufferings she understood now; it was because a great mystery of creation was being enacted in her being.

She had great difficulty in bringing me up, and if I outlived all that had threatened me one might say it was accomplished by a miracle of love. More than twenty times my mother snatched me from the clutches of death. . . . And then what a joy and what a recompense it was to her to see the little wrinkled body fill itself with the sap of health, the rumpled face take on the color of shiny pink, the little eyes open gaily into a smile, the lips, greedy and searching, move and gluttonously pump the life-giving liquid from her nourishing breast! My mother now tasted a few moments of complete and wholesome happiness. A desire to act, to be good and useful, to occupy her hands, heart and spirit, to live at last took hold of her, and even in the most commonplace duties of her household she found a new, a passionate interest which was doubled by a feeling of profound peace. Her gayety came back to her, a natural and gentle gayety without violent outbursts. She made plans, pictured the future to herself with confidence, and many a time she was astonished to discover that she no longer thought of her past — that evil dream which vanished.

I grew. "One can see him getting bigger every day," the nurse used to say. And with rapturous emotions my mother watched the hidden labor of nature which polished the rough places of flesh, giving it more pliant form, more definite features, better regulated move-

ments and poured into the dimness of the brain just emerged from nothingness the primitive glimmer of instinct. Oh, how everything seemed to her now clothed in bright and entrancing colors! It was music of welcome itself, the benediction of love, and even the trees, formerly so full of dread and menace, were stretching out their branches above like so many protecting arms. One was led to hope that the mother had saved the woman. Alas! That hope was of short duration.

One day she noticed in me a certain predisposition to nervous fits, to a diseased contraction of muscles, and she became alarmed. When I was about one year old I had convulsions which came short of finishing me. The fits were so violent that my mouth, even long after the attack was over, remained twisted into an ugly grimace as if paralyzed. My mother would not admit that at periods of rapid growth the majority of children were subject to such fits. She saw in that something which she thought was characteristic of her and her ancestors, she saw in that the first symptoms of a hereditary illness, of a terrible disease which she thought was going to continue in her son. She battled hard, however, against these thoughts which came in hives; she used every bit of energy and vigor she could command to dissipate them, taking refuge in me as if in an inviolable asylum for protection against phantoms and evil spirits. She held me pressed against her bosom, covering me with kisses and saying:

"My little Jean, it is not true, is it? You will live and be happy, won't you? . . . Answer me! . . . Alas! You can't talk, my poor little angel. . . . Oh, don't cry, never cry, Jean, my Jean, my dear little Jean! . . ."

But question as she might, feel as she might my heart beating against her own, my awkward hands gripping her breasts, my legs dangling from under

the loosed swaddling cloth — her confidence was gone, doubts gained the upper hand. An incident which was related to me time and again with a sort of religious terror served to bring consternation into my mother's soul.

One day she was taking a bath. In the hall of the bath room laid out with black and white square slabs, Marie, bent over me, was watching my first uncertain steps. Suddenly, fixing my gaze on a black square, I appeared to be very much frightened. I uttered a cry and, trembling all over as if I had seen something terrible, I hid my head in my nurse's apron.

"What's the matter?" my mother anxiously asked.

"I don't know," answered old Marie. It seemed as though Master Jean had been frightened by a paving block.

She brought me to the spot where my countenance so suddenly changed its expression. But at the sight of the paving slab, I cried out again. My whole body shuddered.

"There must be something!" cried my mother. "Marie, quick, quick, my underwear! . . . My God! — What did he see?"

Having come out of the bath room, she did not want to wait to be wiped, and scarcely covered by her peignoir she stooped over the stone and examined it.

"That's strange," she murmured. "And yet he saw something. . . . but what? . . . There isn't anything. . . ."

She took me in her arms, swayed me. I smiled now, uttering inarticulate sounds and playing with the ribbons of her peignoir. She put me down on the floor. Moving with short, unsteady steps, both arms outstretched, I purred like a kitten. None of the blocks before which I stopped frightened me in the least. Arrived at the fatal block, my face again assumed the expression of horror, and frightened and crying I returned quickly to my mother.

"I tell you there must be something!" she cried. "Call Felix. Let him come with tools . . . a hammer, quick, quick! Tell Monsieur also!"

"It seems strange all the same," assented Marie who, with gaping mouth and eyes wide open, was looking at the mysterious slab. "He must be a sorcerer then!"

Felix lifted one stone, examined it carefully, dug into the mortar below.

"Dig up another one!" my mother commanded. "And that one also . . . another one . . . all of them . . . dig them all up! I want to find out. . . . And Monsieur is not coming!"

In the excitement of her gestures, forgetting that there was a man around, she uncovered herself and revealed her nude body. Kneeling on the blocks, Felix continued digging them up. He took each one out with his brawny hands and shook his head.

"If Madame wants me to tell her. . . . For the rest, Monsieur is way out in the park, busy sharpening the pick-axe. . . . And besides, there is nothing to it . . . the stone blocks are like stone blocks, seemingly of the pavement. That's all! . . . Madame may be sure. . . . Only it might be that that was only in Master Jean's imagination. . . . Madame knows that children are like grown-up folks and that they see things! But as to these slabs, they are just slabs, neither more nor less."

My mother became pale, haggard.

"Shut up!" she ordered, "and get out of here, all of you!"

And without waiting for the execution of her order she carried me out of the room. Her cries, interrupted by the slamming of the door, resounded on the stairway and in the hall.

She never thought, however, poor dear creature that she was, of giving to the bathroom incident a natural

explanation. One could have demonstrated to her that what had frightened me so badly might have been a moving reflection of a towel upon the humid surface of the floor, or perhaps the shadow of a leaf projected from outside across the window, which of course she would not have admitted as likely to have taken place. Her spirit, fed on dreams, tormented by lurid exaggerations and instinctively drawn to the mysterious and the fantastic, accepted with dangerous credulity the vaguest explanation and yielded to the most troubling suggestions. She imagined that her caresses, her kisses, her lulling me to sleep communicated to me the germs of her disease, that the nervous fits which almost caused my death, the hallucinations which shone in my eyes with the sombre radiance of madness, were to her a divine warning, and as soon as she conceived that, the last hope died in her heart.

Marie found her mistress half naked, stretched out on the bed.

"My God! My God!" she moaned, "that's the end of it. . . . My poor little Jean! . . . You, too, they will take away from me! . . . Oh, God, have pity on him! . . . Could that be possible! . . . So little, so weak! . . . "

And while Marie was putting back her clothes which slipped to the ground, trying to quiet her:

"My good Marie," she stammered, "listen to me. Promise me, yes promise me to do as I tell you. . . . You have seen it just now, you have seen it, haven't you? . . . Well, take Jean, and bring him up because I — you see . . . he must not. . . . I'll kill him. . . . Here, you'll stay in this room with him, right near me. . . . You shall take good care of him and tell me all about him. . . . I'll feel his presence there, I'll hear him. . . . But you understand, he must not see me. . . . It is I who make him that way! . . ."

Marie held me in her arms.

" Madame, there is no sense in that at all," she said, " and you really deserve a good scolding as a lesson. . . . Why just look at your little Jean! . . . He is just like a little quail. Now tell her, tell her, my little Jean, that you are well and brave! . . . Look, look at him laughing, the little creature. . . . Put your arms around him, Madame."

" No, no!" my mother cried out wildly. " I must not. . . . Later. . . . Take him away! . . . "

It was impossible to make her abandon this idea. Marie well understood that if her mistress had any chance at all to come back to normal life, to cure herself of her " black moods," it was not in being separated from her child. In the sad state in which my mother found herself, she had but one means of recovery and now she rejected it, impelled to do so by some new and unknown fit of madness. All that a little baby brings of joy, uneasiness, activity, anxiety, forgetfulness of self to the heart of a mother was exactly what she needed and yet she said:

" No, no. . . . I must not. . . . Later. . . . Take him away! . . . "

In her own language, familiar and rude, to which her long devotions entitled her, the old servant maid brought forward all the reasoning and arguments dictated by her common sense and by her simple peasant heart. She even reproached my mother for neglecting her duties, she spoke of her selfishness and declared that a good mother who had any religion at all or even a savage beast wouldn't act as she did.

" Yes," she ended, " that is bad! . . . you have already been so unkind to your husband, poor fellow. Must you now make your child unhappy? "

But mother, always sobbing, could but repeat:

" No, no. . . . I must not. . . . Later. . . . Take him away! . . . "

What was my childhood? A long torpor. Separated from my mother whom I saw but rarely, avoiding my father whom I did not love at all, living almost in seclusion, a miserable orphan between old Marie and Felix in this grand lugubrious house, the silence and neglect of which weighed down upon me like a night of death — I was bored. Yes, I was that rare and wretched specimen of a child who is bored. Always sad and grave, hardly speaking at all, I had none of the inquisitiveness and mischievousness of my age, one might have said that my intellect had been slumbering forever in the numbness of maternal gestation. I am trying to recall, I am trying to bring to life again my feelings of childhood; verily I believe I had none. I was dragging on, all wasted and stultified, without knowing what to do with my legs, my arms, my eyes, my poor little body which annoyed me like a tiresome companion whom one wishes to get rid of. There is not one recollection, not one single impression that has been retained by me even in part. I always wished to be where I was not, and the toys exhaling the wholesome odor of fir trees were lying in heaps around me, without inducing me even to think of touching them. Never did I dream about a knife or wooden horse or picture book. Today, when I see little children running, jumping, chasing one another on the garden lawns, the sandy beaches, I recall with sadness the first mournful years of my life, and while listening to the clear laughter which sounds like the ringing of the angelus of human dawn, I say to myself that all my misfortunes have come from this childhood, lonely and lifeless, unbroken by a single bright event.

I was not quite twelve years old when my mother died. The day on which this misfortune happened the good curé Blanchetière, who liked us very much, pressed me to his breast, then he looked at me for

some time and with eyes full of tears murmured several times: "Poor little devil!" I burst into uncontrollable tears when I saw the good curé cry, for I did not want to reconcile myself to the thought that my mother was dead and never again would come back. During her illness I was forbidden to go into her room, and now she was gone without having let me embrace her! . . . Could she have really deserted me that way? . . . When I was about seven years old and was well she had agreed to re-admit me into her life. It was from this time on that I understood that I had a mother and that I adored her. My sorrowing mother was represented to me by her two eyes, her two large round eyes, fixed, with rings of red around them, which always shed tears without moving the eyelids, which shed tears as does a rain cloud or a fountain. All at once I felt a keen sorrow at the grief of my mother, and it is through this grief that I awoke to life. I did not know what she suffered from, but I knew that her malady must have been horrible; I knew that from the way she used to embrace me. She had fits of tenderness which used to frighten me and which inspire me with fear even now. As she clasped my head, squeezed my neck and moved her lips over my forehead, my cheeks, my mouth, her frenzied kisses often passed into bites, similar to the caresses of a beast; into her embraces she put all the true passion of a lover, as if I had been the adored chimerical being of her dreams, the being that never came, the being whom her soul and her body so ardently desired. Was it possible then that she was dead?

Every evening, before going to bed, I fervently entreated the beautiful image of the Virgin to whom I addressed my prayers: "Holy Virgin, please grant my dear mother good health and a long life." But one morning my father, silent and pale, accompanied the

physician to the gate, and the countenances of both were so grave that it was easy to surmise that something irreparable had happened. Then the servants were crying. What else could they have cried about, if not the loss of their mistress? . . . And then did not the curé come up to me and say "poor little devil!" in a tone of irremediable pity? I remember the smallest details of that frightful day as if it were yesterday. From the room where I was shut in with old Marie I could hear the coming and going of people and other strange noises, and with my forehead pressed against the window pane, I could see through the window blinds women beggars squatted on the lawn, wax-paper in hand, muttering prayers. I saw people enter the courtyard, the men in black, the women with long black veils. "Ah! here is Monsieur Bacoup! . . ." "Why, that's Madame Provost!" I noticed that all of them looked sad, while at the gate which was wide open the children of the choir, the choristers uncomfortable in their black vestments, the Brothers of Charity with their red tunics, one of whom carried a banner and another a heavy silver cross, were laughing aloud and amusing themselves by pushing and jostling one another. The beadle, tinkling his bell, was driving back inquisitive mendicants, and a wagon loaded with hay which had come up on the road was compelled to stop and wait. In vain did I look for the eyes of little Sorieul, a crippled child of my age whom I used to given a small loaf of bread every Saturday; I could not find him anywhere, and that made me feel uneasy. Then suddenly the bells on the church belfry began to toll. Ding! Ding! Dong! The sky was of deep blue, the sun was ablaze. Slowly the funeral procession started out, first the Brothers of Charity and the choristers, the cross which glittered, the banner which fluttered in the air, the curé in a white surplice,

shielding his head with the psalm-book, then something heavy and long covered with flowers and wreaths which some men carried shaking at their knees, then the crowd, a crawling crowd which filled the courtyard, wound itself out on the road, a crowd in which I could distinguish no one except my cousin Merel who was mopping his head with a checkered handkerchief. Ding! Dong! Dong! The church bell tolled for a long, long time; ah! the sad knell! Ding! Dong! Dong! And while the bells were tolling, tolling, three white pigeons continuously fluttered about, pursuing one another around the church right opposite me which projected its warped roof and its slate steeple out of plumb above a clump of acacia and chestnut trees.

The ceremony ended, my father entered my room. He walked back and forth for some time without speaking, his arms crossed on his back.

"Ah! my poor Monsieur," lamented old Marie, "what a terrible misfortune!"

"Yes, yes," replied my father, "it is a great, a terrible misfortune!"

He sank into an armchair, heaving a sigh. I can see him right now with his swollen eyelids, his dejected look, his hanging arms. He had a handkerchief in his hand, and from time to time brought it to his eyes, red from tears.

"Perhaps I did not take good care of her, Marie. . . . She did not like to have me around. . . . Yet I did what I could, everything I could. . . . How frightful she looked, all rigid on the bed! . . . Ah, God! I shall always see her that way. The day after tomorrow she would be thirty-one, would she not?"

My father drew me toward him and seated me on his knees.

"You love me all the same, don't you, my little

Jean?" he asked, rocking me. "Tell me, do you love me? I have no one but you! . . ."

Speaking to himself he said:

"Perhaps it is better that it is so. Who knows what the outcome would be later on! . . . Yes, perhaps it is better this way. . . . Ah! poor little one, look at me straight! . . ."

And as if at that very moment he had divined in my eyes which resembled the eyes of my mother a whole destiny of suffering, he pressed me close to his breast and burst into tears.

"My little Jean! — Ah! my poor little Jean!"

Worn out by the emotion and fatigue of the night before, he fell asleep, holding me in his arms. And I, seized suddenly with a feeling of great pity, listened to this unknown heart which for the first time was beating close to mine.

It had been decided a few months previous to this that I should not be sent to college, but that I should have a private tutor. My father did not approve of this method of education. But he had met with such opposition that he thought best not to interfere, and just as he had sacrificed his domination of husband over wife, he also gave up his right of a father over me. Now I was to have a tutor, for my father wanted to remain faithful to the wishes of my mother even when she was dead.

One fine morning I saw him arrive, a very grave-looking gentleman, very blond, very close shaven, who wore blue spectacles. Monsieur Jules Rigard had very obsolete ideas on education, he carried himself with the stiffness of a servant, and bore a sacerdotal air which, far from encouraging me to learn, made all study disgusting to me. He had been told without a doubt that my mentality was slow and sluggish and, as I understood nothing from his first lesson, he took

that judgment for granted and treated me like an idiot. It never occurred to him to penetrate into my young mind, to hold converse with my heart; never did he ask himself whether under this sad mask of a lonesome child there were not hidden ardent aspirations quite beyond my age, an all too passionate and restless nature eager to know, which introspectively and morbidly unfolded itself in the silence of secret thoughts and mute ecstasies.

Monsieur Rigard stupefied me with Greek and Latin, and that was all. Ah! how many children understood and guided properly, might have become great if they had not been permanently deformed by this frightful crushing of their brains by an imbecile father or an ignorant teacher. Is it all, then, to have lustfully begotten you on an evening of passion, and must not one continue the work of one's life forces by giving you intellectual nourishment as well, in order that it may strengthen your life and provide you with weapons to defend it. The truth was that my soul felt even lonelier with my father than with my teacher! Yet he did everything he could to please me. He consciously, though stupidly, strove to show his love for me. But when I was with him, he could never find anything to tell me outside of foolish, idle tales, bogey man stories, terrifying legends of the revolution of 1848 which had left in him an invincible fear, or else a tale of the brigandage of one Lebecq, a great republican who scandalized the country by his passionate opposition to the curé and his obduracy in refusing to hang red bunting on the walls on national holidays.

Often he would take me along in his cabriolet, on his business trips in the country and, when perplexed as I was by the mystery of nature which every day unfolded itself around me, I asked him questions, he would not know how or what to answer and would

dodge the answer thus: "You are too young to be told that! Wait till you grow up." And feeling miserable by the side of the large body of my father which swayed with the jolts of the road, I huddled up inside the cabriolet, while my father was killing with the stick of his whip the gad flies which swarmed on our mare's croup. Every now and then he would say: "I have never seen such pestering things; we'll have storm, that's sure."

In the church of Saint-Michel, inside a small chapel, illumined by the red glimmer of a window, upon an altar ornamented with embroidery and vases full of flowers, stood a statue of the Virgin. She had a pink body, a blue cloak bespangled with silver stars, a lilac-colored robe whose folds fell modestly upon gilt sandals. . . . In her arms she held a child, rosy and nude with a golden halo around its head, and the eyes of the mother rested rapturously upon the child. For several months this plaster Virgin was my sole friend, and the entire time which I could steal from my lessons I used to spend before this image, contemplating its tender colors. She appeared to me so beautiful, so kind and sweet that no human creature could rival in beauty, kindness and sweetness this painted piece of statuary which spoke to me in an unknown and delightful language and from which there came to me something like the intoxicating odor of incense and myrrh. When near her I was in truth a different child; I felt how rosier my cheeks were getting, how my blood was flowing more vigorously in my veins, how my thoughts disentangled themselves more easily and quickly; it seemed to me that the black veil which hung over my mentality was gradually being lifted, revealing new lights to me.

Marie was made an accomplice in my stealthy flights to the church; she often led me to the chapel

where I remained for hours conversing with the Virgin, while the old nurse fervently recited her Rosary, kneeling before the altar. She had to get me out of my state of ecstasy by force, because otherwise, absorbed as I had been in the dreams which transported me to heaven, I would never have thought of returning home. My passion for this Virgin became so strong that away from her I was miserable and wished I had never left her at all. "Monsieur Jean will surely become a priest," old Marie used to say. It was like a yearning for possession, like a violent desire to take her, to entwine her, to cover her with kisses.

I took a notion to make a sketch of her: with what love, it would be impossible for you to imagine. When the statue had taken on a semblance of crude form on the paper, it gave me joy without end. All the energy in me that I could put forward I employed in this work, which I thought admirable and superhuman. More than twenty times I started the drawing over again, incensed with the crayon for not conforming to the delicacy of the lines, incensed with the paper upon which the image would not appear as live and real as I should have liked to see it. I was rabid on this point. My will was bent upon this unique goal. At length I succeeded in giving more or less exact substance to my idea of the plaster Virgin — but how naïve an idea it was. And immediately thereafter I stopped thinking of it. An inner voice had told me that nature was more beautiful, more moving, more splendid, and I began to notice the sun which caressed the trees, which played upon the pentiles of the roof, covered the grass with gold, illumined the rivers; and I began to listen to all the palpitations of life, whose puffed up creatures scourge the earth like a body of flesh.

The years rolled by, wearisome and void. I remained gloomy, wild, always shut up within myself, fond of running about in the fields, penetrating into the very heart of the forest. It seemed to me that at least there, lulled by the grand voices of things, I was less alone and I felt more alive. Without being endowed with that terrible gift which certain natures have of analyzing themselves, questioning themselves, searching without end for the reason of their actions, I often asked myself who I was and what I wanted. Alas! I was nobody and did not want anything.

My childhood had been spent in darkness, my adolescence was passed in a void; not having been a child I could no more be a young man. I lived in a sort of fog. A thousand thoughts were agitating me, but they were so confused that I could not seize upon their form; none of them detached itself clearly from this depth of opaque mist. I had some aspirations; some exalted notions, but it would have been impossible for me to formulate them, to explain their cause or reason. It would have been impossible for me to say into which world of reality or dream they transplanted me; I had fits of infinite tenderness, in which my whole being would lose itself, but for whom or for what this feeling was intended, I did not know. Sometimes, all of a sudden, I would abandon myself to tears, but the reason for these tears? In truth, I knew not. What was certain was that nothing was to my liking, that I did not see any purpose in living, that I felt myself incapable of any effort.

Children usually say: "I'll be a general, priest, physician, innkeeper." I never said anything of the kind, never; never did I tear myself loose from the present; never did I venture a glimpse into the future. Man appeared to me like a tree which spread out its foliage and stretched out its limbs into the stormy skies, with-

out knowing which flower would bloom at its foot, which birds would sing at its top, or which thunderbolt would fell it to the ground. And notwithstanding that, the feeling of moral solitude in which I found myself oppressed and frightened me. I could not open my heart to my father, to my teacher or to anybody else. I had no friend, not a living soul who could understand, guide or love me. My father and preceptor were disheartened by my waywardness, and in the country I passed for a feebleminded maniac. In spite of everything, however, I was permitted to take my college entrance examinations, and though neither my father nor myself had any idea as to what I should take up, I went to Paris to study law. "Law will get you anywhere," my father used to say.

Paris amazed me. It struck me like a place of tempestuous uproar and raving madness. Individuals and throngs were passing by, strange, incoherent, hurrying to work which I imagined terrible and monstrous. Knocked down by horses, jostled by men, deafened by the roar of the city always in motion like some colossal and hellish factory, blinded by the glare of lights to which I was not accustomed, I roamed about the city in the strange dream of a demented one. I was very much surprised to find trees there. How could they grow there, in that soil of pavements, how could they shoot upwards in the forest of stone, amidst the rumbling noise of men, their branches lashed by evil winds?

It took me a long time to get used to this life which seemed to me the reverse of nature; and from the depths of this boiling hell my thoughts would often wander back to the peaceful fields way yonder which brought to my nostrils the delicious odor of dug up and fertile soil; back to the green retreats of the woods, where I heard only the light rustling of the leaves,

and from time to time in the resonant depths, the dull blows of the ax and the almost human groans of the old oak trees. Nevertheless, curiosity often drove me out of my small room which I occupied on Rue Oudinot, and I sauntered along the streets, the boulevards, the river banks impelled by a feverish desire for walking, my fingers twitching from nervousness, my brains squashed, as it were, by the gigantic and intense activity of Paris, my senses in some way thrown out of balance by all these colors, odors, sounds, by the perversion and strangeness of the contact so new to me. The more I mingled with the crowds, the more intoxicated I became with this uproar, the more I saw multitudes of human lives pass by, brushing one another, indifferent to one another, without apparent attachment, and saw others surge forward, disappear and emerge again and so on forever — the more I felt the overwhelming sense of inexorable loneliness.

At Saint-Michel, although I was lonely, I at least knew some human beings and objects. Everywhere I had points of reference by which my spirit was guided; the back of a peasant bent over his glebe, the ruins of a building at the turn of the road, a ditch, a dog, a clay pit, a charming face — everything there was familiar to me, if not dear. At Paris everything was strange and unknown to me. In this frightful haste with which all seemed to be moving about, in the profound selfishness, in this giddy obliviousness to one another into which they were all precipitated, how could one retain even for a single moment the attention of these people, these phantoms; I don't speak of the attention of tenderness or pity, but of that of simple notice! . . . One day I saw a man who killed another: he was admired and his name was soon on everybody's lips; the next morning I saw a woman

who lifted her skirt going through obscene motions: the crowd followed her.

Being awkward, ignorant of the ways of the world, very timid, I found it hard to make friends. I never even set foot in the homes where I was recommended, for fear of appearing ridiculous. I had been invited for dinner to the home of a cousin of my mother's who was rich and kept a large retinue. The sight of the mansion, the footmen in the vestibule, the lights, the carpets, the heavy perfume of smothered flowers — all this frightened me and I fled, knocking down on the stairway a woman in a red cloak who got up and started to laugh at my bewildered look.

The noisy gayety of the young men, my school comrades, whom I had met at the lectures, at the restaurants, in the cafés, was not to my liking either. The coarseness of their pleasures hurt me, and the women, with their eyes colored with bistre, their overpainted lips, their cynicism and shameless speech and behavior did not tempt me at all. One evening, however, when my nerves were all wrought up, and I was driven by a sudden rutting of the flesh, I went into a house of ill-fame and left it burning with shame, despising myself, remorseful and with the sensation of filth on my skin. What! Was it from this slimy and loathsome act that men were born! From this time on I looked at women more frequently, but my look was no longer chaste, and fixed upon them as upon some impure images, it was searching for sex and stripping them under the folds of their clothes. I came to know their secret vices, which rendered me still more dejected, restless and out of sorts.

A kind of crapulous torpor settled down upon me. I used to stay in bed several days at a stretch, sunk in the brutishness of obscene dreams, awakened now and then by sudden nightmares, by painful attacks of heart-

ache which caused my skin to perspire. In my room, behind drawn curtains, I was thus living like a corpse which was conscious of its death and which from the depth of its grave in the frightful night could hear the stamping of many feet and the rumble of the city about it. Sometimes, tearing myself loose from this dejection, I went out. But what was I going to do? Where could I go? I was indifferent to everything, and I had not a single desire or curiosity. With fixed gaze, with heavy drooping head and listless, I used to walk straight ahead, without purpose, and I would end by flinging myself on a bench in the Luxembourg, senilely shrunk into myself, lying motionless for many hours, without seeing anything, without hearing anything, without asking myself why there were children about me, why there were birds singing, why young couples passed. . . . Naturally I was not working and did not think of anything. . . .

Then war came, then defeat. . . . Despite the opposition of my father, despite the entreaties of old Marie, I enlisted.

CHAPTER II

OUR regiment was what is called a march regiment, that is, one formed while on the march. It had been made up at Mans, after much trouble, of all the remains of a corps of dissimilar fighting units which encumbered the city. Zuaves, mobilized soldiers, of franc-tireurs, forestry guards, dismounted cavalrymen, including gendarmes, Spaniards and Wallachians — there were troops of every kind and description, and they were all under the command of an old captain quickly promoted for the occasion to the rank of lieutenant colonel. At that time, such promotions were not infrequent. The gaps of human flesh wrought in the ranks of the French by the cannons of Wissembourg and Sedan had to be filled. Several companies lacked officers.

At the head of mine was a little lieutenant of the reserves, a young man of twenty, frail and pallid and so weak that after marching a few kilometers he was out of breath, dragged his feet and usually reached his destination in an ambulance wagon. The poor little devil! It was enough to look at him to make him blush, and never did he allow himself to issue orders for fear of appearing ridiculous. We jeered at him because of his timidity and weakness, and no doubt because he was kind and would sometimes distribute cigars and meat supplies to the men. I quickly inured myself to this new life, carried away by examples and overexcited by the fever about me. And reading the heartbreaking reports of our lost battles, I felt myself transported by enthusiasm which, however, was not mingled with any thought of my threatened father-

land. We remained a month in Mans for training, to get our full equipment and to frequent cabarets and houses of ill-fame. At last, October 3, we started out.

Composed of stray units, of detachments without officers, of straggling volunteers poorly equipped, poorly fed and more often not fed at all,— without cohesion, without discipline, everyone thinking of himself only, and driven by a unique feeling of ferociousness, implacable selfishness; some wearing police caps, others having silk handkerchiefs wrapped round their heads; still others wearing artillery pants and vests of batmen — we were marching along the highways, ragged, harassed and in an ugly mood.

For twelve days since we had been incorporated into a brigade of recent formation, we were tramping across the fields like madmen and to no purpose, as it were. Today marching to the right, tomorrow to the left, one day covering a stretch of forty kilometers, the next day going back an equal distance, we were moving in the same circle, like a scattered herd of cattle which has lost its shepherd. Our enthusiasm diminished appreciably. Three weeks of suffering were enough for that. Before we could ever hear the roar of cannon and the whiz of bullets, our forward march resembled a retreat of a conquered army, cut to pieces by cavalry charges and precipitated into wild confusion. It was like a panicky flight in which each one was allowed to shift for himself. How often did I see soldiers getting rid of their cartridges by scattering them along the roads?

"What good will they do me?" one of them said. "I don't need them at all except one to crack the jaw of our captain, the first chance we get to fight."

In the evening, in camp, squatted around the porridge pot or stretched out on the cold furze, with heads resting on their knapsacks, they were thinking of the

homes from which they had been taken by force. All the young men, strong and healthy, had come from the villages. Many of them were already sleeping in the ground way yonder, disembowelled by shells; others with shattered backs, like shadows, were straggling in the fields and in the woods awaiting death. In the small country places, left to sorrow, there were only old men, more stooped than ever, and women who wept. The barn-floors where they thrashed corn were mute and closed, in the deserted fields where weeds sprouted, one no longer saw against the purple background of the sunset the silhouette of the laborer returning home, keeping step with his tired horses. And men with long sabres would come and in the name of the law take away the horses one day and empty the cowshed the next; for it was not enough that war should glut itself with human flesh, it was necessary that it should also devour beasts, the earth itself, everything that lived in the calm and peace of labor and love. . . . And at the bottom of the hearts of all these miserable soldiers whose emaciated frames and flagged limbs were lit up by the sinister glare of camp fires — there was one hope, the hope of the coming battle, that is to say, the hope of flight, of butt turned upwards, and of the German fortress.

Nevertheless we were preparing for the defence of the country which we traversed and which was no longer threatened. To accomplish that we thought it would be best to fell trees and scatter them on the roads; we blew up bridges and desecrated cemeteries at the entrance to villages under the pretext of barricading them, and we compelled the inhabitants at the point of the bayonet to help us in the destruction of their property. Then we would depart, leaving behind us nothing but ruin and hatred. I remember one time we had to raze a very beautiful park to the last stad-

dling, in order to build barracks which we never used at all. Our manner of doing things was not at all such as to reassure the people. And so at our approach the houses were shut, the peasants hid their provisions; everywhere we were met by hostile faces, surly mouths and empty hands. There were bloody scuffles over some potted pork discovered in a cupboard, and the general ordered an old and kindly man shot for hiding a few kilograms of salted pork under a heap of manure.

The first of November we marched all day and about three o'clock we arrived at the railroad station of Loupe. There was great disorder and unspeakable confusion at first. Many, leaving the ranks, scattered in the direction of the city, ten kilometers away, and disappeared in the neighboring cabarets. For more than an hour the bugles sounded a rally. Mounted men were sent to the city to bring back the runaways, but they themselves lingered there to get a drink. There was a rumor afloat that a train made up at Nogent-le-Rotrou was supposed to take us to Chartres menaced by the Prussians who were said to have sacked Maintenon and were camping at Jouy. A workman questioned by our sergeant said that he did not know anything about it, nor did he hear anything ever said about it. The general, rather old, short, stout and gesticulating, who could hardly sit up in his saddle, galloped hither and thither, shaking and swaying like a drunkard on his saddle horse and with purple face, bristled moustach, repeated without end:

"Ah! scoundrel!... Ah! scoundrel of scoundrels!..."

He dismounted, assisted by his orderly; his legs got tangled up in the leather strap of his sabre which dragged on the ground, and having called over the station master, entered into a most animated conversation with the latter whose countenance showed perplexity.

"How about the mayor?" shouted the general. "Where is that scoundrel? Get me that fellow! . . . Are they trying to make a fool out of me here or what!"

He was out of breath, sputtered out unintelligible words, stamped his feet and scolded the station master. Finally both of them, one with a mien of humility, the other gesticulating furiously, disappeared into the telegraph office from which there came to us the clicking of the apparatus, frenzied, excited, interrupted from time to time by the outbursts of the general. At last it was decided to draw us up on the quay in company formation, and we were left there standing, knapsack on the ground, in front of the formed arm racks. . . . Night came, rain fell, drizzling and cold, penetrating through our uniforms already drenched by showers. Here and there the road was lit up by small dim lights, rendering more sombre than ever the storehouses and the mass of wagons which men were pushing into a shed. And the derrick crane standing upright on the turning platform projected its long neck against the sky like a bewildered giraffe.

Apart from coffee which we gulped down hurriedly in the morning, we did not eat anything all day, and although fatigue had worn out our bodies and hunger clutched our stomachs, we anticipated with horror that we would have to go without supper today. Our gourd-bottles were empty, our supplies of biscuits and bacon exhausted, and the wagons of the commissary department which had gone astray had not yet joined our columns. Several among us grumbled, made threats and voiced their rebellious feelings aloud, but the no less dejected officers who were promenading in front of the arm racks, did not seem to take notice of it. I consoled myself with the thought that the general had perhaps requisitioned food in the city. It was a

vain hope. The time passed, the rain kept steadily drumming on the hollow mess plates and the general continued swearing at the station master who in turn went on avenging himself verbally on the telegraph, the click of which became more and more violent and erratic. From time to time trains came up overcrowded with troops. Soldiers of the reserve, light infantry units, bare-breasted, bare-headed, with loose cravats, some of them drunk and wearing their kepis wrong side up, deserted the wagons where they were parked, invaded the taverns and even relieved themselves in public impudently. From this swarm of human heads, from this stamping on the floor of the cars by multitudes there emanated oaths, sounds of the Marseillaise, obscene songs which mingled with shouts of the gangs of workmen, with the tinkling of bells, with the panting of machines. . . . I recognized a little boy from Saint-Michel whose swollen eyelids oozed, who coughed and spat blood. I asked him where they were going. He did not know. Having left Mans, they were held up at Connerre for twelve hours without food because of congestion on the road,—too crowded to lie down and sleep. He hardly had strength enough to speak. He went into a tavern to rinse his eyes with warm water. I shook hands with him, and he said he sincerely hoped that in the first battle the Germans would make a prisoner of him. . . . And the train pulled out, disappeared in the night, carrying all these wan faces, all these bodies already vanquished —— toward what useless and bloody slaughters?

I shivered with cold. Under the icy rain which drenched me to the very marrow, I felt a terrible cold penetrating me. It seemed as if my members were getting numb. I took advantage of the confusion caused by the arrival of a train to reach the

open gate and run out on the road in search of a house or cover where I could warm myself, find a piece of bread or something. The inns and public places near the station were guarded by sentries who had orders not to let anyone in. . . . Three hundred yards away I noticed a few windows which shone gently in the night. These lights looked to me like two kindly eyes, two eyes filled with pity which called me, smiled to me, caressed me. . . . It was a small house isolated a few strides away from the road. I ran toward it. . . . A sergeant accompanied by four men was there, shouting and swearing. Near the fireplace without a fire, I saw an old man seated on a very low wicker chair, his elbows resting on his knees, his face buried in his hands. A candle burning in an iron candlestick lit up half of his face hollowed and furrowed by deep wrinkles.

"Will you give us some wood, I am asking you for the last time?" shouted the sergeant.

"I ain't got no wood," answered the old man. . . . "It's been eight days since the troops passed here, I tell you. . . . They took everything away."

He huddled himself up on the chair and in a feeble voice muttered:

"I ain't got . . . nothing . . . Nothing! . . . "

"Don't act the rogue, you old rascal. . . . Ah, you are hiding your wood to warm the Prussians. . . . Well I am going to knock those Prussians out of your head."

The old man shook his head:

"But if I ain't got no wood. . . . "

With angry gestures the sergeant commanded the soldiers to search the house. They examined everything, looked everywhere from cellar to garret. They found nothing, nothing but evidence of plunder and some broken furniture. In the cellar, damp with spilled cider, the casks were broken open and over the

whole there spread a hideously offensive stench. That exasperated the sergeant who struck the flat end of the butt of his musket.

"Come on," he shouted, "come on, you old sloven, tell us where your wood is," and he rudely shook the old man who tottered and almost struck his head against the andiron of the fireplace.

"I ain't got no wood," the poor man simply repeated.

"Ah! you are getting stubborn! . . . You have no wood you say! Well, look here, you have chairs, a buffet, a table, a bed . . . if you don't tell me where your wood is I'll burn it all up."

The old man did not protest. Shaking his aged white head he again repeated:

"I ain't got no wood."

I wanted to intercede and muttered a few words; but the sergeant did not let me finish. He took me in from head to foot with a look of contempt.

"What are you doing around here, you errand simp you? Who gave you permission to leave the ranks, you dirty, snotty-nosed trash? Come on, face about double step, march! . . . Ta ra ta ta ra, ta ta ra! . . ."

Then he gave the command. In a few minutes the chairs, the tables, the buffet, the bed were dashed to pieces. The kindly man raised himself with some effort, went into the farthest corner of the room; and while the fire was being made, while the sergeant, whose cloak and trousers were steaming, was warming himself laughingly in front of the crackling fire, the old man was watching the burning of his last piece of furniture with eyes of a stoic, and never stopped repeating obstinately:

"I ain't got no wood."

I went back to the station. The general had come out of the telegraph office more excited and flushed and angry than ever. He jabbered out something and

presently brought about a great commotion. The clang of sabres was heard, voices called out and answered one another, officers were running in all directions. The bugle sounded. Without the least understanding of this counter order, we had to put our knapsacks on our backs and the guns on our shoulders.

Forward! March! . . .

With bodies rendered rigid by immobility and with dizzy heads, we pushed and jostled one another and resumed our breathless journey in the rain, in the mud, through the night! . . . To the right and the left of us there were long stretches of fields swallowed up in the shadows from which rose the crowns of apple trees which appeared to be twisted in the skies. From time to time the barking of a dog was heard from afar. . . . There were deep forests, sombre thickets which rose like walls on each side of the road. Then came villages asleep, where our steps resounded even more mournfully, or where at a window quickly opened and quickly closed again, there appeared the vague outline of a human white form . . . terrified. . . . Then again fields and woods and villages. . . . Not a single song, not a single word, only an immense silence, accentuated by the rhythm of the tramping feet. The leather straps of the knapsack cut into my flesh, the rifle felt like a red hot iron bar placed upon my shoulder. For a moment I thought myself harnessed to a huge wagon, loaded with broad stone and stuck in the mud and felt that the carters were breaking my legs with the lashes of whips. With my feet planted in the ground, my spine bent in two, with outstretched neck, strangled by the bit, my lungs emitting a rattling sound, I was pulling and pulling. . . . Pretty soon I reached a state where I was no longer conscious of anything. I was marching in a state of torpor, like an automaton, as if in a trance. . . . Strange hallucinations flitted before

my eyes. I saw a glowing road receding into space, lined with palatial mansions and brilliant lights. . . . Strange scarlet flowers swayed their corollæ in the air on the top of flexible stems, and a crowd of gay people were singing at tables laden with refreshments and delicious fruit. . . . Women with fluttering gauze skirts were dancing on illumined lawns, to the music of numerous orchestras hidden in the grove strewn with falling leaves, adorned with jasmines, sprinkled with water.

"Halt!" commanded the sergeant.

I stopped, and in order not to sink down to the ground I had to hold on to the arm of a comrade. I awoke from my trance. . . . Darkness was all around me. We had come to the entrance of a forest, near a small town where the general and most of the officers went to find quarters. Having pitched my tent, I occupied myself with rubbing my feet, the skin of which was peeling off, with a candle which I had hidden in my knapsack, and like an emaciated dog, stretched myself out on the wet ground and immediately fell asleep. During the night, fellow-soldiers who, exhausted with fatigue, had dropped out of the ranks on the road, kept on coming into camp. Of these, five men were never heard from. It was ever so at each difficult march. Some of the men, weak or sick, fell into the ditches and died there; others deserted. . . .

The next morning reveille was sounded at dawn. The night had been extremely cold, it never stopped raining and we could not get any straw litter or hay to sleep on. It was very difficult for me to get out of the tent; for a while I was obliged to crawl on my knees on all fours, my legs refusing to carry me. My limbs were frozen stiff like bars of iron, I could not move my head on my paralyzed neck, and my eyes which felt as if they had been pricked by numerous

tiny needles, kept shedding tears in ceaseless streams. . . . At the same time I felt an acute, lancinating, unbearable pain in my back and shoulders. I noticed that my comrades fared no better. With drawn faces of ghostly pallor they were advancing, some limping piteously, others bent down and staggering over clumps of underbrush — all lame, mournful and covered with mud. I saw several men who, seized with the colic, writhed and twisted their mouths, holding their hands to their bellies. Some of them were shivering with fever, and their teeth chattered with cold. All around us one could hear dry coughs rending human breasts, groans, short and raucous breathing. A hare ventured out of its cover and fled wildly, with its ears flapping, but no one thought of pursuing the animal as we used sometimes to do. After the roll call, foodstuffs were distributed, as the commissary regained our regiment. We made some soup which we ate as greedily as half-starved dogs.

I was still suffering. After the soup I had an attack of dizziness followed by vomiting, and I shook with fever. Everything around me was in a whirl — the tents, the forest, the fields, the small town way yonder, whose chimneys were smoking in the mist, and the sky where huge clouds were floating, bleak and low. I asked the sergeant for permission to see a doctor.

Our tents were arranged in two rows, backed against the forest on each side of the road of Senonches which led into the open country through a magnificent grove of oak trees, crossed the Chartre road three hundred meters away and still further the town of Belhomert and extended farther toward Loupe. At the crossing of these two roads there was a small dilapidated building covered with thatch, a sort of abandoned shed which provided shelter for the laborers on the road

during rain. It was here that the surgeon had established a sort of improvised field hospital recognizable by a Red Cross flag put up in a crack in the wall and adorning it.

In front of the house a crowd was waiting. A long line of human beings, wan and worn out, some standing with fixed looks, others sitting on the ground, sad with stooped and pointed shoulders, their heads buried in their hands. Death had already laid its terrible hand upon these emaciated countenances, these scraggy frames, these members which hung loose, devoid of blood and marrow. And confronted with this heartbreaking sight, I forgot my own suffering, and my heart was touched with pity. Three months were sufficient to break down these robust bodies, inured to labor and fatigue! . . . Three months! And these young men who loved life, these children of the soil who grew up as dreamers in the freedom of the fields, trusting in the goodness of nature, these youths were done for! . . . To the marine who dies is given the sea as a burying place; he descends into eternal darkness to the rhythm of its murmuring waves. But these! . . . A few more days of grace perhaps, and then these tatterdemallions will suddenly tumble down into the mud of a ditch, their corpses delivered up to the fangs of prowling dogs and to the beaks of nightbirds.

I was swept by a feeling of such brotherly and sorrowful pity for them that I wished I could press all these unhappy men to my breast, in a single embrace, and I wished, oh, how ardently I wished it! — I had a hundred female breasts, like Isis, swollen with milk, that I might offer to all these bloodless lips. . . They were entering the house one by one and were leaving it as quickly, pursued by growling and swearing sounds. For the rest, the surgeon did not bother with them at

all. Very angry, he was demanding of his orderly his medicine chest which was missing from the luggage.

"My medicine chest, for God's sake!" he shouted. "Where is my medicine chest? And my instrument case? . . What did you do with my instrument case? Ah! for God's sake! . . ."

A little soldier of the reserves who suffered from an abscess on his knee came back hopping on one foot, crying, pulling his hair in despair. They did not want to attend to him. When it was my turn to go in I was all atremble. Inside the place which was dark, four patients, lying flat in the straw, were emitting rattling sounds like the cock of a musket; a fifth one was gesticulating, muttering incoherent words in delirium; still another, half-reclining, with head drooped on his chest, was moaning and asking for a drink in a feeble voice, the voice of an infant. Squatted in front of the fire place, an attendant was holding over the flame, on the end of a stick, a piece of stale pudding whose stench of burned grease filled the room. The adjutant did not even look at me. He shouted:

"Well, what's the matter now? . . . A bunch of lazy buggers. A good ten league run at a stretch will fix you up, you straggler. . . . Face about! . . . . March!"

On the threshold I met a peasant woman who asked me:

"Is this the place where you can see the doctor."

"Women now!" growled the adjutant. "What do you want now?"

"Beg pardon, excuse me, Doctor," rejoined the peasant woman, who came up very timidly. "I came for my son who is a soldier."

"Tell me now, old woman, am I here to keep track of your son, or what?"

With her hands crossed on the handle of her umbrella, timorous, she examined the place about her.

"It seems like he is very sick, my son is, very, very sick. . . And so I came to see if he was not around here, Doctor."

"What's your name?"

"My name is Riboulleau."

"Riboulleau.... Riboulleau! . . . That may be.... look in that pile there."

The attendant who was broiling his pudding turned his head.

"Riboulleau," he said, "why he has been dead three days already. . ."

"What is that you are saying?" cried the peasant woman whose sunburned face suddenly became pallid. "Where did he die? . . . Why did he die, my little darling boy."

The adjutant intervened, and rudely pushing the old woman toward the door, shouted:

"Go on, go on, no scenes around here! Well, he is dead — and that is all there is to it."

"My little darling boy! My little darling boy!" wailed the old woman in a heart-breaking manner.

I walked away with a heavy heart and felt so discouraged that I was asking myself whether it was not better to put an end to it all at once by hanging myself on the branch of a tree or by blowing my brains out with the gun. While I was going to my tent, stumbling on the way, I was hardly paying any attention to the little soldier who, having stopped at the foot of a pine tree, had opened his abscess with his knife himself, and, pale, with sweat drops rolling all over his forehead, was bandaging his bleeding wound.

In the morning I felt a great deal better than I thought I would. I was relieved of all work, and after having greased my rifle which became rusted in the rain, I enjoyed a few hours of rest. Stretched out on my blanket, with my body torpid in delicious half

slumber where I distinctly heard all the noises of the camp — the sounding of the bugle, the neighing of the horses as if coming from afar — I was thinking of the people and the things I had left behind me. A thousand images and a thousand scenes of the past rapidly filed before my eyes. I saw again the Priory, my dead mother and my father, with his large straw hat and the short beggar with his flaxen hair and Felix squatted in the lettuce patches, lying in wait for a mole. I saw again my study room, my school mates and, topping the noise of the Bal Bullier, Nini, her hair loose and brown, with her ruddy neck and her pink stockings showing like some lascivious flower from under the skirt raised in dancing. Then the image of an unknown woman in a yellow dress, whom I noticed in the shadow of a box in a theatre one evening, came back to me — an insistent and sweet vision.

During this time the strongest among us had gone out to roam in the fields and on the farms. They came back merrily carrying bundles of straw, chickens, turkeys and ducks. One of them was driving before him with a switch, a big, grunting pig; another was balancing a sheep on his shoulder. At the end of a halter the latter was also dragging a calf which, tangled up in the rope, resisted comically and shook its snout, bellowing all the time. The peasants came up running to the camp to complain that they had been robbed; they were hooted and driven out.

The general, very stiff and with round eyes, came to review us in the afternoon, accompanied by our lieutenant who walked at his right. His shiny look, his flushed cheeks, his mealy voice bore witness to the fact that he had had a plentiful breakfast. He was munching the end of an extinguished cigar; he spat, sniffed, swore. One could not tell at whom or what,

for he did not address himself to any one in particular. When standing in front of our company, he looked at our lieutenant-colonel severely, and I heard him say:

"Your men are dirty slops!"

Then he walked away, his body weighed down by his belly, dragging his feet, dressed in yellow boots above which red breeches swelled and folded like a skirt.

The rest of the day was devoted to loitering in the taverns of Belhomert. There was such crowding and such noise everywhere, and besides I knew so well these fights in the cabarets, these violent outbursts as a result of drunkenness which often degenerated into general scuffles, that I preferred to go out on the road, far from all these brawls, in the company of a few peaceable comrades.

Just then the weather grew better, dim sunlight came from the sky freed from clouds. We seated ourselves on the side of a sloping hill, bending our backs under the warm sun rays as does a cat under the hand that caresses it. Vehicles kept passing by, heavy carts, dung carts, small carriages with awning hoods, rubbish carts drawn by small mules. Those were the peasants of Chartres valley who were fleeing from the Prussians. . . . Excited by rumors, spread from village to village, of burnings, robberies, murders and all kinds of atrocities committed by the Germans in the invaded territories, they were carrying away in haste their most precious possessions, abandoning their homes and their fields and, utterly bewildered, were proceeding straight ahead, without knowing where they were going. In the evening they would stop at some chance road, near a town, sometimes in the open fields. The horses, unharnessed and fettered, browsed on the river banks, the people ate and slept at God's mercy, guarded by dogs, in storm and rain, in the cold

of foggy nights. Then in the morning they would start out again. Droves of animals, and throngs of men succeeded one another alternately. They were passing by us, and upon the yellow main road one could see the black and mournful procession of the refugees as far as the hill closing the horizon: one might think it was an exodus of a whole people. I questioned an old man who led a donkey pulling a cart, at the bottom of which in the midst of bundles, tied with kerchiefs, and carrots and heads of cabbage, on a pile of straw there shifted about a peasant woman with a flat nose, two pink-colored pigs and a few domestic fouls tied by their feet in twos.

"Eh, the robbers!" the old man replied. "Don't speak to me about them! . . . They came one morning, a whole gang of them with plumed hats. . . . They raised such a racket! . . . Eh, Holy Jesus! And then they took everything away. . . . Well I thought they were the Prussians. . . . I have found out since that they were the 'franc-tireurs'. . ."

"How about the Prussians?"

"The Prussians! . . . Of them that are Prussians I have seen very few to be sure. . . . They are supposed to be up at our place right now! . . . Jacqueline thinks she saw one behind the hedge the other day! . . . He was tall, very tall and he was as red as the devil. . . . Is he really one of these fellows, those savages that came? . . . Now tell me truly who are they?"

"Those are Germans, old man, just as we are French."

"Germans? . . . So I hear. . . . But what do they want, those damned Germans, will you please tell me, mister soldier? . . . Well, I have saved two pigs, our girl and all our poultry just the same! . . . By Jove!"

And the peasant continued on his way, repeating:

"The Germans! the Germans! . . . What do these damned Germans want?"

That evening fires were made along the entire line of the camp, and the attractive looking pots full of fresh meat were hissing joyously upon the improvised stoves of earth and stone. For us that was a time of exquisite respite and delicious forgetfulness. Peace seemed to have descended from heaven, all blue with the moon and aglitter with stars; the fields, unrolling themselves with soft and misty undulations, had in them a kind of tender sweetness which penetrated into our souls and set new blood, less acrid and endowed with new vigor, circulating in our members. Little by little, memories of our hardships, our discouragements and privations, however near, effaced themselves, and simultaneously with the awakening of our sense of duty, a desire for action seized us. Unusual animation reigned at our camp. Every one offered voluntarily to do some kind of work; some, torch in hand, were running about to light again the fires which went out, others were blowing at the ashes in order to kindle them into flame again, still others were sorting vegetables and slicing meat. Some comrades, forming a circle around the débris of burned timber, struck up a tune "Have you seen Bismark?" in a jeering chorus. Revolt — the child of hunger — had its inception in the hissing of saucepans, in the clatter of platters.

The next day, when the last of us answered "Present" at the roll call, the little lieutenant gave the command: "Form a circle, march!"

And in a faltering voice, jumbling the words and skipping phrases, the quartermaster read a pompous order of the day, issued by the general. In that piece of military literature it was said that a Prussian army corps, starving, ill-clad and without arms, after having

occupied Chartres, was advancing on us at double marching time. Our task was to block its way, to throw it back as far as the walls of Paris, where the valiant Ducrot was only waiting for our arrival to sally out and clean the land of all invaders at one sweep. The general recalled the victories of the Revolution, the Egypt expedition, Austerlitz, Borodino. He expressed the faith that we would show ourselves worthy of our glorious ancestors of Sambre-et-Meuse. In view of that he gave precise strategic instructions for the defense of the country, namely: to establish an impregnable barrier to the eastern entrance to the town and another still more impregnable barrier upon the road of Chartres, to fortify the walls of the cemetery at the cross-road, to fell as many trees as possible in the nearby forest so that the enemy cavalry and even infantry should be unable to turn our flank from Senonches under the cover of the woods, to be on the lookout for spies, and finally to keep our eyes open. . . . The country was counting on us. . . . Long live the Republic!

The cheer was not responded to. The little lieutenant who was walking around, his arms crossed on his back, his eyes obstinately fixed on the point of his boot, did not raise his head. We looked at one another perplexed, with a sort of anguish in our hearts, which came as a result of our knowledge that the Prussians were very near, that war was going to begin for us in earnest the very next day, today perhaps. And I had a sudden vision of Death, red Death standing on a chariot, drawn by rearing horses, which was sweeping down on us, brandishing his scythe. As long as the actual fighting was only a remote possibility we wanted to be in it, first for reasons of patriotism, enthusiasm, then out of mere braggadocio, later because we were nervously exhausted and wearisome

and saw in it a way out of our misery. Now when the opportunity offered itself, we were afraid; we shuddered at the mere mention of it. Instinctively my eyes turned toward the horizon, in the direction of Chartres. And the fields seemed to me to conceal a secret, unknown terror, a fearful uncertainty, which lent to things a new aspect of relentlessness. Over yonder, above the blue line of trees, I expected to see helmets spring up suddenly, bayonets flash, the thundering mouths of cannons spurt fire. A harvest field, all red under the sun, appeared to me like a pond of blood. Hedges strung themselves out into armies, joined ranks, crossed one another like regiments, bristling with arms and standards and going through various evolutions before the battle. The apple trees looked frightened like cavalry men thrown into disorder.

"Break the circle — march!" shouted the lieutenant.

Stupefied, with swinging arms, we were standing on one place for a long time, a prey to some vague misgiving, trying to pierce in thought this terrible line on the horizon, behind which was now being realized the mystery of our fate. In this disquieting silence, in this sinister immobility, only carts and herds were passing by, more numerous, more hurried and pressed than ever. A flock of ravens, which came from yonder like a black vanguard, spotted the skies, thickened, distended and, stringing itself out into a line, turned aside, floating above us like a funeral cloak, then disappeared among the oak trees.

"At last we are going to see them, these famous Prussians!" said, in a faltering voice, a big fellow who was very pale and who, in order to give himself the air of a fearless daredevil, was beating his ears with his kepi.

No one replied to this remark and several walked

away. Our corporal, however, shrugged his shoulders. He was a very impudent little man, with a pock-eaten face, full of pimples.

"Oh! I!" he said.

He clarified his thought by a cynical gesture, sat down on the heath, puffed at his pipe slowly, till fire appeared.

"Oh, piffle!" he concluded, emitting a cloud of smoke which vanished in the air.

While one company of chasseurs was detailed to the crossroads to establish an "impregnable barrier" there, my company went in the woods to "fell as many trees as possible." All the axes, bill-hooks and hatchets of the village were speedily requisitioned. Almost everything was used as a tool. For a whole day the blows of the axes were resounding and trees were falling. To spur us on to greater efforts, the general himself wanted to assist us in the vandalism.

"Come on, you scamps!" he would cry out at every occasion, clapping his hands. "Come on boys, let's get this one! . . ."

He himself pointed out the most stalwart among the trees, those which grew up straight and spread out like the columns of a temple. It was an orgy of destruction, criminal and foolish; a shout of brutal joy went up every time a tree fell on top of another with a great noise. The old trees became less dense, one could say they were mowed down by some gigantic and supernatural scythe. Two men were killed by the fall of an oak tree.

And the few trees which remained standing, austere in the midst of ruined trunks lying on the ground, and the twisted branches which rose up towards them like arms outstretched in supplication, were showing open wounds, deep and red gashes from which the sap was oozing, weeping as it were.

The supervisor of the forest section, warned by a guard, came running from Senonches, and with a broken heart witnessed this useless devastation. I was near the general when the forester approached him respectfully, kepi in hand.

"Beg pardon, general," said he. "I can understand the felling of trees on the edge of the road, the barricading of lines of approach. . . . But your destruction of the heart of the old forest seems to me a little. . . ."

But the general interrupted:

"Eh? What? It seems to you what? . . . What are you butting in here for? . . . I do as I please. . . . Who is commander here, you or I? . . ."

"But. . . ." stammered the forester.

"There are no buts about it, Monsieur. . . . You make me tired, that's one thing sure! . . . You had better hurry back to Senonches or I'll have you strung up on a tree. . . . Come on, boys! . . . "

The general turned his back on the stupefied agent and walked away knocking some dead leaves and sprigs before him with the end of his cane.

While we were thus desecrating the forest, the chasseurs were not idle either, and the barricade rose, huge and formidable, cutting off the road at the cross-road. It was accomplished not without difficulty and above all not without gayety. Suddenly halted by a trench which barred their flight, the peasants protested. Their carts and herds became congested on the road, very narrow at this point; there was, therefore, an indescribable uproar. They were complaining, the women were moaning, the cattle were lowing, the soldiers were laughing at the frightened looks of men and beasts, and the captain who was in command of the troops did not know what action to take. Several times the soldiers pretended to drive the peasants back at the point of the bayonet, but the latter

were stubborn and determined to pass and invoked their rights as Frenchmen. Having made his round in the forest, the general went to see the progress of the work on the barricade. He demanded to know what "these dirty civilians" wanted. He was told about it.

"All right," he cried. "Seize all their carts and throw them into the barricade. . . . Come on, get a move on you, boys! . . ."

The soldiers, rejoicing in the opportunity, hurled themselves on the first carts which stood abandoned with everything in them, and smashed them with a few blows of the pick-axe. A wild panic broke out among the peasants. The congestion became so great that it was impossible for them either to advance or to turn back. Lashing their horses with all their might and trying to extricate their impeded wagons, they were shouting, jostling and bruising one another without making a step backward. Those last arrived had turned back and were going at full speed of their horses excited by the tumult; others, despairing of a chance to save their carts and provisions, climbed over the barrier and, dispersing across the field, uttered cries of indignation, pursued by oaths and curses flung at them by the soldiers. Then, they piled up the smashed vehicles one on top of the other, filled the gaps with sacks of oats, matresses, bundles of clothes and stones. On top of the barricade, upon a coach pole, which rose vertically upward like a flag-staff, a little chasseur planted a bouquet of wedding flowers found among other booty.

Towards the evening, groups of reserves arriving from Chartres in great disorder, scattered all over Belhomert and the camp. They brought horrible tales. The Prussians were more than a hundred thousand strong, all in one army. They, the reserves,

hardly had time to fall back. . . . Chartres was in flames, the villages in the vicinity were burning, the farms were destroyed. The greater part of the French detachments which bore the brunt of covering the retreat, could not hold out much longer. The fugitives were questioned; they were asked whether they saw the Prussians, what insignia they wore and were particularly quizzed about all the details of the enemy uniforms.

Every fifteen minutes new reserves would show up in groups of two or three, pale, exhausted with fatigue. Most of them had no kits, some had no guns, and they were telling stories, each more terrible than the other. None of them was wounded. It was decided to quarter them in the church, to the great indignation of the curé who, lifting his arms to heaven, exclaimed:

"Holy Virgin! . . . In my church! . . . Ah! Ah! Soldiers in my church! . . ."

Up to this time the general who was preoccupied solely with his plans of destruction, had no time to provide for the guarding of the camp, except by establishing a small outpost in a tavern, frequented by carterers within a mile from Belhomert upon the Chartres road. This outpost, commanded by a sergeant, had not received any definite instructions, and the man did nothing except loaf, drink and sleep. Still the sentinel who was nonchalantly pacing to and fro in front of the tavern, gun on shoulder, at one time arrested a country doctor as a German spy because of his blond beard and blue spectacles. As for the sergeant, an old professional poacher who sneered at everything and everybody, he amused himself by setting traps for rabbits in the hedges nearby.

The arrival of the reserves, the menace of the Prussians had thrown us into confusion. Messengers came up every minute, carrying sealed envelopes containing

orders and counter-orders. The officers were running about with a preoccupied look, not knowing what to do, and completely lost their heads. Three times we were ordered to break up camp and three times we were told to pitch our tents anew. All night trumpets and bugles were sounding, and big log fires were burning, around which, in the growing tumult, were passing back and forth shadows strangely agitated, silhouettes of demoniacal appearances. Patrols were scouring the fields, riding out on the crossroads, searching the outskirts of the forest. Artillery stationed on this side of the town was ordered to move up forward upon the heights, but it ran into the barricade. To clear the way for the cannons, it was found necessary to demolish it piece-meal and to fill up the ditch.

At daybreak my company was sent to do main guard duty. We met mobilized soldiers, dispirited franc-tireurs who were dragging their feet piteously. A little further away, the general, accompanied by his staff, was watching the manœuvres of the artillery. He held a map of the general staff, unfolded on the neck of his horse, and was vainly trying to locate the Saussaie mill. Bending over the map which the horse shifted out of place with every movement of its head, he shouted:

"Where is that damned mill? . . . Pontgouin. . . . Couville. . . . Courville. . . . Do they think I know all their damned mills around here?"

The general commanded us to halt and asked:

"Is there anyone here who is familiar with this country? . . . Is there anyone here who knows where the Saussaie mill is?"

Nobody answered.

"No? . . . Well alright. To hell with it!"

And he threw the map to his aide who began folding it up carefully. We resumed our march.

The company was stationed on a farm and I was put on guard duty near the road, at the entrance to a grove, beyond which I could look on an open plain, immense and smooth like the sea. Here and there small woods emerged from the ocean of land like islands; the belfries of the villages, the farms, blurred by the fog, assumed the aspect of a distant veil. In this enormous expanse a great silence reigned, a solitude wherein the least noise, the least thing stirring in the skies, had something mysterious about it which put anguish into one's heart. Up above, black dots spotted the skies — those were the ravens; down below, upon the earth, small black specks moved forward, growing larger, disappearing — those were the fleeing soldiers of the reserves; and now and then the distant barking of dogs, answered by similar barking all along the line from east to west, from north to south, sounded like the plaint of the deserted fields. Our guard was supposed to be relieved every four hours, but hours upon hours passed, slow and endless, and no one came to take my place.

No doubt they had forgotten all about me. With a heavy heart I was searching the horizon on the Prussian side, the French side; I saw nothing, nothing but this hard, relentless line, which encircled the huge grey sky around me. It was a long time since the ravens had ceased flying and the reserve soldiers fleeing. For a moment I saw a truck coming toward the woods where I was, but it turned off on one of the roads and soon was no longer distinguishable from the grey terrain. . . . Why did they leave me thus? . . . I was hungry and I was cold, my bowels rumbled, my fingers became numb. I ventured out on the road a little; having walked a few steps I shouted. . . . Not

a being answered my call, not a thing stirred. . . . I was alone, utterly alone, alone in this deserted, empty field. . . . A shudder passed through my frame, and tears came into my eyes. . . . I shouted again. . . . No answer. . . . Then I went back into the woods and sat down at the foot of an oak tree, with my rifle across my lap, keeping a sharp lookout and waiting. . . . Alas! The day was waning little by little, the sky grew yellow, then purple by degrees and finally vanished in deadly silence. And night, moonless and starless, fell upon the fields, and at the same time a chilling fog arose from the shadows.

Worn out with fatigue, always occupied with something or other and never alone, I had no time to reflect on anything from the moment we started out. But still confronted by the strange and cruel sights constantly before my eyes, I felt within me the awakening of the idea of human life which until now had lain slumbering in the sluggishness of my childhood and the torpor of my youth. Yes . . . the idea awoke confusedly, as if emerging from a long and painful nightmare. And reality appeared to me more frightful than the nightmare. Transposing the instincts, the desires and passions which agitated us from the small group of errant men that we were to society as a whole, recalling the impressions so fleeting and wholly external which I had received in Paris, the rude crowds, the pushing and jostling of pedestrians, I understood that the law of the world was strife; an inexorable, murderous law, which was not content with arming nation against nation but which hurled against one another the children of the same race, the same family, the same womb. I found none of the lofty abstractions of honor, justice, charity, patriotism of which our standard books are so full, on which we are brought up, with which we are lulled to sleep, through which

they hypnotize us in order the better to deceive the kind little folk, to enslave them the more easily, to butcher them the more foully.

What was this country, in whose name so many crimes were being committed, which had torn us — formerly so full of love — from the motherly bosom of nature, which had thrown us, now so full of hatred, famished and naked, upon this cruel land? . . . What was this country, personified to us by this rabid and pillaging general who gave vent to his madness on old people and trees, and by this surgeon who kicked the sick with his feet and maltreated poor old mothers bereaved of their sons? . . . What was this country every step on whose soil was marked by a grave, which had but to look at the tranquil waters of its streams to change them into blood, which was always frittering away its man power, digging here and there deep charnel vaults where the best children of men were rotting? . . . And I was astounded, when for the first time it dawned upon me that only those were the most glorious, the most acclaimed heroes of mankind who had pillaged the most, killed the most, burned the most.

They condemn to death the stealthy murderer who kills the passerby with a knife, on the corner of the street at night, and they throw his beheaded body into a grave of infamy. But the conqueror who has burned cities and decimated human beings, all the folly and human cowardice unite in raising to the throne of the most marvelous; in his honor triumphal arches are built, giddy columns of bronze are erected, and in the cathedrals multitudes reverently kneel before his tomb of hallowed marble guarded by saints and angels under the delighted gaze of God! . . . With what remorse did I repent of the fact that until now I had remained blind and deaf to this life so full of

inexplicable riddles! Never had I opposed this mysterious book, never had I stopped even for a single moment to consider the question marks which are represented by things and beings; I did not know anything. And now, suddenly, a desire to know, a yearning to wrest from life some of its enigmas tormented me; I wanted to know the human reason for creeds which stupefy, for governments which oppress, for society which kills; I longed to be through with this war so that I might consecrate myself to some ardent cause, to some magnificent and absurd apostleship.

My thought traveled toward impossible philosophies of love, toward utopias of undying brotherhood. . . . I saw all men bent down beneath some crushing heels; they all resembled the little soldier of the reserves at Saint-Michel, whose eyes were running, who was coughing and spitting blood, and as I knew nothing of the necessity of higher laws of nature, a feeling of compassion rose within me, clogging my throat with suppressed sobs. I have noticed that a man has no real compassion for anyone except when he himself is unhappy. Was this not, after all, but a form of self-pity? And if on this cold night, close to the enemy who would perhaps come out of the fogs of the morrow, I loved humanity so much — was it not myself only that I loved, myself only that I wanted to save from suffering? These regrets of the past, these plans for the future, this sudden passion for study, this ardor which I employed in picturing myself in the future in my room on the Rue Oudinot, in the midst of books and papers, my eyes burning with the fever of work — was this not after all only a means to ward off the perils of the present, to dispel other horrible visions, visions of death which, blurred and blunted,

incessantly followed one another in the terror of darkness?

Night, impenetrable night continued. Under the sky which brooded over them, sinister and greedy, the fields stretched like a vast sea of Shadow. At long intervals, out of the dead whiteness, long curtains of fog were floating up above, grazing the invisible ground where clumps of trees here and there appeared still darker in the surrounding darkness. I never stirred from the place where I sat down, and the cold numbed my members and chapped my lips. With difficulty I raised myself and walked on the outskirt of the woods. The sound of my own steps on the ground frightened me, it always seemed to me that someone was walking behind me. I was walking carefully, on tiptoe, as if afraid to wake the sleeping earth, and listened, trying to penetrate the darkness, for in spite of everything, I had not yet given up the hope that some one would come to relieve me. Not a stir, not a breath, not a glimmer of light in this blind and mute night. Twice, however, I distinctly heard the sound of steps, and my heart thumped violently. . . . But the noise moved away, grew fainter by degrees, ceased altogether and silence set in again, more oppressive, more terrible, more disheartening than ever.

A branch brushed against my face; I recoiled, seized with terror. Further away, a rise in the ground appeared to me like a man who with crooked back seemed to be crawling toward me; I loaded my rifle. . . . At the sight of an abandoned plough with its arms turned upward toward the sky, like the menacing horns of some monster, my breath left me and I almost fell on my back. . . . I was afraid of the shadow, of the silence, of the least object that extended beyond the line of the horizon and which my deranged imag-

ination endowed with a soul of sinister life. . . . Despite the cold, perspiration in large drops was streaming upon my face. . . . I had a notion to quit my post, to return to camp, persuading myself by all sorts of ingenious and cowardly arguments that my comrades had forgotten all about me and that they would be glad to see me back with them. Obviously, since I had not been relieved by anyone from my company, and saw none of the officers make his round of inspection, they must have left. . . . But supposing I were mistaken about it, what excuse could I offer, and how would I be received at the camp? . . . To go back to the farm where my company was quartered this morning and ask for instructions? . . . I was thinking of doing it. . . . But in my plight I had lost all sense of direction, and if I attempted to do that I would surely get lost in this plain that was so endless and so black.

Then an abominable thought flashed through my mind. . . . Yes, why not discharge a bullet into my arm and run back, bleeding and wounded, and tell them that I had been attacked by the Prussians? . . . I had to make a strong effort to regain my reason which was leaving me; I had to gather all the moral forces that were left in me in order to get away from this cowardly and odious impulse, from this wretched ecstasy of fear, and I desperately strove to recall the memories of former times, to conjure up gentle and silent visions, sweet-scented and white-winged. . . . They came to me as in a painful dream, distorted, mutilated, under the spell of hallucination, and fear immediately threw them into confusion. . . . The Virgin of Saint-Michel, with a body of pink, in a blue mantle, adorned with golden stars, I saw in a lewd attitude, prostituting herself on a bed, in some miserable shack, with drunken soldiers. My favorite spots in the Tourouvre forest, so peaceful, where I used to

stay for entire days, stretched out on the mossy ground, were turning topsy-turvy, tangled up, brandishing their gigantic trees over me; then a few howitzer shells crossed one another in the air, resembling familiar faces which sniggered; one of these projectiles suddenly spread out wide wings, flame-colored, which swung around me and enveloped me. . . . I cried out. . . . My God, am I going crazy? I felt my breast, my chest, my back, my legs. . . . I must have been as pale as a corpse, and I felt a shiver passing through me from heart to brain, like a steel bore. . . .

"Let's see now," I said aloud to myself to make sure that I was awake, that I was alive. . . . In two gulps I swallowed the remainder of the whiskey in my flask, and I started to walk very fast, tramping with rage upon the clods under my feet, whistling the air of a soldier song which we used to sing in chorus to relieve the tedium of the march. Somewhat calmed, I came back to the oak tree and kicked its trunk with the sole of my boots; for I was in need of this noise and this physical motion. . . . And now I thought of my father so lonely at the Priory. It was more than three weeks since I had received a letter from him. Oh! How sad and heart-rending his last letter was! . . . It did not complain of anything, but one felt in it a deep despair, a wearisomeness of being alone in that large empty house, and anxiety about me who, he knew, was wandering, knapsack on back, amidst the dangers of battle. . . . Poor father! He had not been happy with my mother — who was ill, always fretful, who did not love him and could not stand his presence. . . . And never a sign of reproach, not even when meeting with the most painful rebuff and unkindness! . . . He used to bend his back like a dog, and walk out. . . .

Ah! how I repented of the fact that I did not love

him enough. Perhaps he had not brought me up in the manner he should have done. But what difference did it make? He did everything he could! . . . He was himself without experience in life, defenseless against evil, of a kindly but timid nature. And in the measure that the features of my father stood out clearly before me even to their smallest details, the face of my mother was obliterating itself, and I was no longer able to recall its endearing outline. At this moment all the affection that I had for my mother I transferred to my father. I recalled with tenderness how on the day my mother died he took me on his lap and said, "Perhaps it's for the best." And now I understood how much sorrow accumulated in the past and terror in facing the future there was summed up in that phrase. It was for her sake that he said that, and also for the sake of one who resembled my mother so much, and not for his own consolation, unhappy man that he was, who had resigned himself to suffering all. . . . During the last three years he had aged very much; his tall frame was worn out, his face, formerly so red with the color of health, grew yellow and wrinkled, his hair became almost white. He no longer lay in wait for the birds in the park, he let the cats rove among the lianas and lick the water from the basin; he took little interest in his practice, the direction of which he left to his chief clerk, a trusted man who was stealing from him; he no longer occupied himself with the small but honorable affairs of his locality. He never went out, he would not even stir from his rocking-chair with small pillows which he ordered moved into the kitchen, not wishing to stay alone — without Marie who would bring him his cane and his hat.

"Well, Monsieur, you must take a little walk. You are getting all 'rusty' in your corner there. . . ."

"All right, Marie. I am going to take the air. . . . I'll walk along the bank of the river, if you want me to."

"No, Monsieur, you must take a walk in the woods. . . . The air there will do you good."

"All right, Marie, I am going to take a walk in the woods."

At times, seeing him inactive, slumbering, she would tap him on the shoulder:

"Why don't you get your rifle, Monsieur? There are a lot of finches in the park."

And looking at her with an air of reproach, my father would mutter:

"Finches? . . . The poor things! . . ."

Why did my father not write to me? Did my letters reach him at all? I reproached myself with having been too dry in my letters until now, and I promised myself to write to him the next day — the first opportunity I got — a long affectionate letter, in which I was going to pour out my heart to him.

The sky was gradually clearing way yonder on the horizon whose outline stood out clear against a darker blue. It was still night, the fields remained dark, but one could feel the approaching dawn. The cold was more piercing than ever, the earth cracked harder under the feet, moisture crystallized into drops on the branches of the trees. And little by little the sky was brightened by a faint glimmer of pale-gold color which was growing in distinctness. Gradually, outlines emerged from the shadow, indefinite and confused as yet, the opaque blackness of the plain changed into a dull violet, here and there rent by light. . . . Suddenly I heard a noise, weak at first, like the distant roll of a drum. . . . I listened, my heart beating violently. Presently the noise stopped and the cocks crowed. . . . About ten minutes later

the noise started again, more distinct, coming nearer! . . . Pa-ta-ra! Pa-ta-ra! It was the gallop of a horse on the Chartres road. . . . Instinctively I buckled up my knapsack on my back and made sure that my rifle was loaded. . . . I was very excited, the veins in my temples dilated. . . . Pa-ta-ra! Pa-ta-ra! . . .

Hardly had I time enough to squat down behind the oak tree, when on the road, at a distance of twenty paces in front of me, there suddenly appeared a large shadow, surprisingly immobile, like an equestrian statue of bronze, and this enormous shadow which obtruded itself almost entirely upon the brightness of the eastern sky was terrible to behold. . . . The man appeared to me superhuman, inordinately large against the sky! . . . He wore the flat cap of the Prussians, a long black cloak, under which the chest was bulging out greatly. Was he an officer or a plain soldier? I did not know, for I could not distinguish any insignia of rank on the dark uniform. . . . His features, at first indistinct, became more accentuated. He had clear eyes, very limpid, a broad beard, his bearing bespoke youthful strength; his face breathed power and kindness along with something noble, audacious and sad which struck me. Holding his hand flat on his thigh, he studied the country before him, and his horse scraped the ground with its hoofs and puffed long streams of vapor in the air through its quivering nostrils. . . . Evidently this Prussian was reconnoitering, he came to observe our position, the nature of the ground; undoubtedly a whole army was swarming behind him, waiting for a signal from this man to throw themselves on the plain! . . .

Well hidden in my woods, with rifle ready, I was watching him. . . . He was handsome indeed, life flowed abundantly in this robust body. . . . What a pity! He kept on studying the country, and it seemed

to me as though he were studying it more like a poet than a soldier. . . . I detected a sort of emotion in his eyes. . . . Perhaps he forgot why he had come here and allowed himself to be fascinated by the beauty of this virginal and triumphant dawn. The sky became all red, it blazed up gloriously, the awakened fields unrolled themselves in the distance, emerging one after another from their veil of mist, rose-colored and blue, which floated like long scarves ruffled by invisible hands. The trees were dripping dew, the hovels separated themselves from the pink and blue background, the dove-cot of a large farm whose new tile roofs began to glitter, projected its whitish cone into the purple glare of the east. . . . Yes, this Prussian who started out with the notion to kill, was arrested, dazzled and reverently stirred by the splendor of a new-born day, and his soul for a few minutes was the captive of love.

"Perhaps it's a poet," I said to myself, "an artist; he must be kind, since he is capable of tenderness."

And upon his face I could see all the emotion of a brave man which agitated him, all the tremors, all the delicate and flitting reactions of his heart, moved and fascinated. . . . I feared him no longer. On the contrary, a sort of infatuation drew me towards him, and I had to hold on to the tree to keep myself from going to this man. I would have liked to speak to him, to tell him that it was well that he contemplated the heaven thus, and that I liked him because of his receptiveness to beauty. . . . But his face grew sombre, a sadness stole into his eyes. . . . Ah, the horizon over which they swept was so far, so far away! And beyond that horizon there was another and further on, still another! One had to conquer all that! . . . When was he to be relieved of his duty ever to spur his horse on through this nostalgic territory, always to cut a

way through ruins and through death, always to kill, always to be cursed! . . .

And then, undoubtedly, he was thinking of the things he had left behind; of his home resounding with the laughter of his children, of his wife, who was waiting for him and praying to God while doing so. . . . Will he ever see her again? . . . I was sure that at this very moment he was recalling the most fugitive details, the most childish habits of his life at home . . . a rose plucked one evening, after dinner, with which he adorned the hair of his wife, the dress which she wore when he was leaving, a blue bow on the hat of his little daughter, a wooden horse, a tree, a river view, a paper knife! . . . All the memories of his joys came back to him, and with that keenness of vision which exiled persons possess, he encompassed in a single mental glance of despondency all those things by means of which he had been happy until now. . . .

The sun rose higher, rendering the plain larger, extending the distant horizon still farther. . . . I felt a compassion for this man and I loved him . . . yes I swear I loved him! . . . Well, then, how did that happen? . . . A detonation was suddenly heard, and at that very moment I caught sight of a boot in the air, of a torn piece of a military cloak, of a mane flying about wildly on the road . . . and then nothing, I heard the noise of a blow with a sabre, the heavy fall of a body, furious beats of a gallop . . . then nothing. . . . My rifle was warm, and smoke was coming out of it. . . . I let it fall to the ground. . . . Was I the victim of hallucination? . . . Clearly not. Of the large shadow which rose skyward at the middle of the road like an equestrian statue of bronze there was left but a small corpse all black, stretched out face downward, with crossed arms. . . . I recalled the poor cat that my father had killed, when with fasci-

nated eyes she had been following the flight of a butterfly. . . .

Stupidly, unconsciously, I had killed a man whom I loved, a man with whom my soul had just identified itself, a man who in the dazzling splendor of the rising sun was retracing the purest dreams of his life! . . . Perhaps I had killed him at the very moment that that man had said to himself: "And when I shall see her again at home. . . ." Why? For what reason? Since I loved him, since, if soldiers had menaced him, I would have defended him! Why of all men was it he I assassinated? In two bounds I was beside this man; I called him. . . he did not move. My bullet had pierced his neck under the ear, and blood was gushing from an opened vein with a gurgling sound, collecting into a red pool and sticking to his beard. . . . With trembling hands I raised him slowly, his head swung from side to side, fell back, inert and heavy. . . . I felt his chest where the heart was: it beat no longer. . . . Then I raised him again, supporting his head with my knees, and suddenly I saw his eyes, his two clear eyes which looked at me sadly, without hatred, without reproach, his two eyes which seemed to be alive! . . . I thought I was going to faint, but gathering all my strength in a supreme effort, I clasped the dead body of the Prussian, placed it right in front of me and pressing my lips against this bleeding face from which long, purple threads of congealed slaver were hanging, I desperately kissed it! . . .

From this moment on I don't remember anything. . . . I see again smoky fields covered with snow, and ruins burning incessantly, ever recurring dismal flights, delirious marches during the night, confusion at the crossroads congested with ammunition wagons, where the dragoons with drawn swords were driving their horses right into our midst and trying to cut a

way through the wagons; I see again funeral carriages, followed by dead bodies of young men which we buried in the frozen ground, saying to ourselves that tomorrow would be our turn; I see again, near the cannon carriages, large carcasses of horses dismembered by howitzer shells, stiff, cut up, over which we used to quarrel in the evening, from which we used to carry away, into our tents, bleeding portions which we devoured growling, showing our teeth like wolves! . . . And I see again the surgeon, with sleeves of his white coat rolled up, pipe in mouth, amputating on a table, in a farmhouse, by the smoky light of a tallow candle, the foot of a little soldier still wearing his coarse shoes! . . . But above all I see again the Priory, when worn out and broken in body and spirit by these sufferings, rendered apathetic by the disaster of defeat I re-entered it one nice and sunny day. . . . The windows of the large house were closed, the window blinds were down in every room. . . . Felix, more bent than ever, was cleaning the walk and Marie, seated near the kitchen door, was knitting a pair of stockings, wagging her head.

"Well! Well!" I shouted, "is that the way you receive me!"

As soon as the two noticed me, Felix went away as if frightened and Marie growing pale, uttered a cry.

"What's the matter?" I asked with a heavy heart. "How about father?"

The old woman looked at me fixedly.

"Why, don't you know? . . . Haven't you received anything? . . . Ah, my poor Monsieur Jean! My poor Monsieur Jean!"

And with eyes filled with tears, she stretched out her arms in the direction of the cemetery.

"Yes! Yes! There is where he is now, with Madame," she said in a dull voice.

CHAPTER III

TOC, toc, toc.

And at the same time a small drawn otter skin bonnet appeared in the slight opening of the door, followed by two smiling eyes under a veil, then a long fur cape which outlined the slender body of a young woman.

"I am not disturbing you? . . . May I come in?"

Lirat, the painter, raised his head.

"Ah! it's you, Madame!" he said in a curt tone, almost irritated, while shaking his hands soiled with pastel. "Why, yes, certainly. . . . Come right in!"

He left his easel and offered a seat.

"How is Charles?" he asked.

"He is all right, thank you."

She sat down, smiling, and her smile was really charming as well as sad. Although covered with a veil, her clear eyes of pinkish blue, her very large eyes which illuminated her whole figure, seemed to be radiating infinite kindness. . . . She was dressed very elegantly, without striving to be pretentious. A little over-perfumed, however. . . . There was a moment of silence.

The studio of the painter Lirat, situated in a peaceful section of the Faubourg Saint Honoré, on Rodrigues Square, was a vast, bare place with grey walls, with rough carpentry work and without furniture. Lirat called it familiarly "his hangar." A hangar it was, indeed, where the north winds blew and the rain entered the room through the small crevices in the roof. Two long tables of plain wood supported boxes of paint, scrap books, blocks, handles of fans, Jap-

anese albums, casts, a mess of odd and useless things. Near a book case filled with old magazines in a corner there was a pile of pasteboard, canvas, torn sketches with the stretchers sticking through. A shattered sofa creaking with a sound like that of a piano out of tune, whenever one tried to sit on it, two rickety arm chairs, a looking glass without a frame — constituted the only luxury of the studio illumined by trembling sunlight. In the winter, on days when Lirat had a model posing for him in the studio, he used to light his little cast iron stove whose chimney, crooked into several large bends, supported by iron wire and covered with rust, rose in a serpentine fashion in the middle of the room, before losing itself in the roof through an opening, all too large. On other days, even during the coldest nights, he substituted for the heat of the stove an old coat of astracan fur, worn out, bald and scabby, which he put on with real pleasure.

Lirat took a childish pride in this dilapidated studio, and he boasted of its bareness as other painters do of their embroidered plush and tapestries, invariably historical in origin. Nay, he even wanted it to be still less attractive, he wanted its floor to be the bare ground. "It is in my studio that I learn who my best friends are," he would often say, "they always come again, the others stay away. That's very convenient." Very few came more than once.

The young woman was attractively seated in her chair, her bust slightly bent forward, her hands buried in her muff; from time to time she would take out an embroidered handkerchief and bring it slowly to her mouth which I could not see because of the thick border of the veil which hid it, but which I surmised was very beautiful, very red and exquisitely shaped. In her whole figure, elegant and refined, about which, in spite of the smile which rendered it so

alluring, there was an air of modesty and even haughtiness, I could distinguish only these beautiful eyes which rested on objects like the rays of some heavenly star, and I followed her gaze which passed from the floor to the frame work, so vibrant with luminosity and caresses. The embarrassing silence continued. I thought I alone was the cause of this embarrassment and I was getting ready to leave, when Lirat exclaimed:

"Ah! Pardon! . . . I have forgotten. . . . Dear Madame, allow me to introduce to you my friend Jean Mintié."

She greeted me with a gracious and at the same time coaxing nod of her head and in a very sweet voice, which thrilled me deliciously, she said:

"I am delighted to meet you, Monsieur, but I know you well."

While very much flushed, I was stammering out a few confused and silly words, Lirat broke in mockingly:

"I hope you are not going to make him believe that you have read his book?"

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur Lirat. . . . I have read it. . . . It is very good."

"Yes, like my studio and my painting, isn't that right?"

"Oh, no! what a comparison!"

She said it frankly, with a laugh, which rolled through the room like the chirping of a bird.

I did not like this laughter. Although it had a hard, sonorous quality, it nevertheless rang false. It seemed to me out of harmony with the expression of her face, so delicately sad, and then, in my admiration for Lirat's genius it hurt me almost like an insult. I do not know why, but it would have been more pleasing to me if she had expressed her admiration for this

great unrecognized artist, if she had shown at this moment a loftier judgment, if she had evinced a sentiment superior to those of other women. On the other hand the contemptuous manner of Lirat, his tone of bitter hostility, shocked me deeply! I had a grudge against him for this affected rudeness, for this attitude of boyish insolence which lowered him in my esteem, I thought. I was displeased and very much embarrassed. I tried to speak of indifferent things, but not a single object of conversation came to my mind.

The young woman got up. She walked a few steps in the studio, stopped before the sketches lying in a heap, examined one or two of them with an air of disgust.

"My God! Monsieur Lirat," she said, "why do you persist in painting such ugly women, so comically shaped?"

"If I should tell you," Lirat replied, "you would not understand it."

"Thanks! . . . And when will you paint my portrait?"

"You should ask Monsieur Jacket or, better still, a photographer about that."

"Monsieur Lirat?"

"Madame!"

"Do you know why I came?"

"To oblige me with your kindness, I suppose."

"That's in the first place! . . . And then?"

"We seem to be playing an innocent little game? That's very nice."

"To ask you to come to dine with me on Friday? Do you care to?"

"You are very kind, dear Madame, but on Friday that is just when it will be utterly impossible. That's my day at the Institute."

"Well, of all things! . . . Charles will be hurt by your refusal."

"You will express my regrets to him, will you not?"

"Well, good bye, Monsieur Lirat! A person can freeze to death here."

And walking over to me, she gave me her hand.

"Monsieur Mintié. I am home every day, from five to seven! . . . I shall be delighted to see you . . . delighted. . . ."

I bowed and thanked her, and she went out leaving in my ears some of the music of her voice, in my eyes some of the kindliness of her look and in the studio the strong perfume of her hair, of her cape, of her muff, of her small handkerchief.

Lirat resumed his work without saying a word; I was turning over the pages of a book which I was not reading at all, and upon the moving pages there was flitting incessantly back and forth the image of the young visitor. I certainly was not asking myself what kind of an impression I had retained of her, nor whether I had retained any impression at all; but although she went out, she was not gone entirely. There was left with me an indefinite something of this short-lived apparition, something like a haze which assumed her form in which I could make out the shape of her head, the turn of the back of her neck, the movement of her shoulders, the graceful curve of her waistline, and that something haunted me. . . . I still beheld her in that chair which she had just left, unfathomable and more charming than ever, with her tender and luminous smile which radiated from her and created a halo of love about her.

"Who is that woman?" I suddenly asked, in a tone which I forced myself to render indifferent.

"What woman?" said Lirat.

"Why, the one that has just left."

"Ah! Yes . . . my God! A woman just like others."

"I should think so. . . . This does not tell me her name, however, nor who she is."

Lirat was rummaging in his paint box. He answered carelessly:

"And so you want to know the name of that woman. . . . Strange curiosity! . . . Her name is Juliette Roux. . . . As for biographical information, the police can furnish you all you want, I imagine. . . . I presume that Juliette Roux gets up late, that she has her fortune told by cards, that she is deceiving and ruining as well as she can that poor Charles Malterre, an excellent chap whom you met here sometime ago, and whose mistress she is, for the time being. . . . Lastly, she is like other women, only with this difference, which makes her case worse: she is more beautiful than most of them and consequently more foolish and more malicious. . . . That sofa there, that you are sitting on . . . it was Charles who broke it by lying and crying on it for entire days, while telling me his troubles, you understand? One day he caught her with a croupier of a gambling club, on another day with a buffoon at the Bouffes theatre.

"There was also an affair with the wrestler of Neuilly, to whom she gave twenty francs and Charles' old trousers. As you see, it's full of idylls. . . . I like Malterre very much. . . because he is good-natured and his lack of sense evokes my pity. . . . He really has my sympathy. . . . But what can one say to such men, to whom love is the greatest thing in life and who can't see a woman's back without tacking on to it wings of dreams and sending it flying to the stars. . . . Nothing, isn't that true? . . . So much so that the unfortunate fellow, in the midst of his rage and sobs, could brag about the fact that Juliette had received a good education. He used to take pride in the fact

that she came from the womb of a physician's wife and not from that of the wife of a janitor, and he would show me her letters, emphasizing the correct spelling and the elegant turn of phrases! . . . He seemed to say: 'How I suffer, but how well written this is!'. . . What a pity!"

"Ah! You, too, love the woman!" I exclaimed, when he finished his tirade.

And foolishly, I added:

"They say you have suffered much."

Lirat shrugged his shoulders and smiled:

"You talk like Delauney, of the Comédie-Française. No, no, my kind friend, I have not suffered; I have seen others suffer, and that was enough for me . . . do you understand?"

Suddenly his voice became shrill, an almost cruel light shone in his eyes. He resumed:

"Ordinary people, poor devils like Charles Malterre, when stepped upon, are crushed, they disappear in the blood, in the mire, in the atrocious filth stirred up by woman's hands . . . that's unfortunate of course. . . . Humanity, however, does not claim them back; for nothing has been stolen from it. . . . But artists, men of our calibre with big hearts and big brains,—when these are lost, strangled, killed! . . . You understand? . . . "

His hand trembled, he crushed his crayon on the canvas.

"I have known three of them, three wonderful, divine ones; two died by hanging themselves; the third one, my teacher, is in a padded dark room at Bicêtre! . . . Of this pure genius there has been left only a lump of wan flesh, a sort of raving beast who grimaces and hurls himself at you with froth at his mouth! . . . And in this crowd of cast-offs, how many young hopes have perished in the grasp of the beast of prey! Count

them up, all these lamentable, bewildered, maimed people; those who had wings and who are now crawling on all fours; those who scrape the earth with their nails and feed on their own excrements! Why, you yourself . . . a minute ago looked at Juliette with ecstasy . . . you were ready to do anything for a kiss from her. . . . Don't deny it, I saw you. . . . Oh! well, let's go out; that's enough, I can't work any more."

He arose and paced across the studio in agitation. Gesticulating and angry, he upset the chairs and pasteboards, ripped some of his sketches with a kick. I thought he was going mad. His bloodshot eyes rolled wildly; he was pale, and the words were coming out of his drawn-up mouth in a violent jumble.

"For men to be born of woman . . . men! . . . How irrational! For men to be conceived in an impure womb! . . . For men to gorge themselves with woman's vices, with her imbecile, ferocious appetites, to have sucked the sap of life from her nefarious breasts! Mother! . . . Ah! yes, mother! . . . Divinized mother, eh? Mother who creates us, sick and wasted race that we are, who stifles the man in the child and hurls us nailless and toothless, stupid and tamed, upon the bedstead of a mistress and the nuptial bed! . . ."

Lirat stopped for a moment; he was choking. Then, bringing his hands together and knotting his crisp fingers in the air, as if gripping an imaginary neck, he shouted madly, terribly:

"This is what should be done with them, all of them, all of them! . . . Do you understand? . . . eh . . . tell me? . . . All of them! . . ."

And he began pacing back and forth again, swearing, stamping his feet. But the last shout of anger had evidently relieved him.

"Come now, my dear Lirat, calm yourself," I said

to him. "What's the use of getting excited, and over what, I ask you? Come now, you are not a woman."

"That's true, too, but you provoked me with this Juliette. . . . How does this Juliette concern you anyway?"

"Was it not natural on my part to want to know the name of the person to whom you had introduced me? . . . And then, frankly, pending the invention of some other machine than woman for breeding children . . ."

"Pending that . . . I am a brute," interrupted Lirat, who again seated himself before his easel, a little ashamed of himself, and in a quiet voice asked:

"Dear little Mintié, would you mind sitting for me a little. That won't bore you, will it? For only ten minutes."

Joseph Lirat was forty-two years old. I made his acquaintance casually one evening; I no longer remember where it was, and though he had the reputation of being a misanthrope, unsociable and spiteful, I instantly took a fancy to him. Is it not painful to think that our deepest friendships, which ought to be the result of a long process of selection, that the gravest events in our life which should be brought about by a logical chain of causes, are for the most part, the instant result of chance? . . . You are at home in your study, tranquilly absorbed in a book. Outside the sky is grey, the air is cold: it is raining, the wind is blowing, the street is gloomy and dirty, therefore you have every good reason in the world not to stir from your chair. . . . Yet you go out, driven by weariness, by idleness, by something you yourself don't know—by nothing, . . . and then at the end of a hundred steps, you meet the man, the woman, the carriage, the stone, the orange peel, the mud puddle which upsets your whole existence from top to bottom.

In the midst of the most sorrowful of my experiences I used to think of these things, and often I would say to myself—with what bitter regrets!—"If on the evening when I met Lirat, in the forgotten place where I certainly had nothing to do, I had but stayed at home and worked or dreamed or slept, I would have been today the happiest man on earth and there would have happened to me none of the things which did happen to me." And that moment of trivial hesitancy, the moment when I was asking myself: "Shall I go out or shall I not?," that moment embraced the most important act in my life; my whole destiny was determined in the brief space of time which in my memory left no more trace than a gust of wind, which blows down a house or uproots an oak tree, leaves upon the skies! I recall the most insignificant details of my life. For example, I remember the blue velvet suit, laced in front, which I wore on Sunday, when I was very little. I can swear, yes I can swear, that I could count the grease spots on the habit of curé Blanchetière or even the number of tobacco grains he used to drop while snuffing up his pinch of snuff.

It seems a senseless and yet disquieting thing: very often when I cry, or look at the sea or even watch the sunset upon an enchanted field—I can still see by that odious freak of irony which is at the bottom of our ideals, our dreams and our sufferings—I can still see upon the nose of an old guard we had, father Lejars, a big tumor, grumous and funny with its four hair filaments which proved an excellent attraction for flies. . . . Whereas the moment which decided my life, which cost me my peace, my honor, and reduced me to the position of a scabby dog; this moment which I passionately wish to reconstruct, to bring back again to memory with the aid of physical reminders and mental associations—this moment I cannot recall.

Thus it is that in the course of my life there happened a tremendous, a singular event, since all the subsequent occurrences flow from it, and yet the recollection of it escapes me entirely! . . . I remember neither the occasion, nor the place, nor the circumstances, nor the immediate cause of that event. . . . What do I know then about myself? . . . What do people in general know about themselves, when they are hopelessly unable to trace the sources of their actions? Nothing, nothing, nothing! And must one explain the enigmas which our mental phenomena and the manifestation of our so-called will represent, by the promptings of this blind mysterious force, the fatality of human nature? . . . That is not speaking to the point, however.

I said that I had met Lirat one evening by accident, in a place I don't remember and that instantly I took a fancy to him. . . . He was the most original of men. . . . With his forbidding appearance, his machine-like and magisterial stiffness and his air of a petty official, he at first made the impression of a typical functionary, of some orleanist puppet such as are manufactured in the politicians' clubs and drawing rooms for the punch and judy show of parliaments and academies. From a distance, he positively looked like one who is in the habit of distributing decorations, excize offices and prizes for valor! This impression, however, quickly disappeared; for this it was sufficient to listen, if only for five minutes, to his conversation, lucid, colorful, bristling with original ideas, and above all to feel the power of his glance, his extraordinary glance, exhilarated and cold at the same time, a glance to which all things seemed familiar, which went through you like a gimlet against your will.

I liked him very much, only in my liking for him there was lacking the element of tenderness, of kindliness; I liked him with a sort of fear and uneasiness,

with a painful feeling that in his presence I did not amount to much and that I was eclipsed, so to speak, by the grandeur of his genius. . . . I liked him as one likes the sea, the tempest, as one likes some immense force of nature. Lirat inspired me with fear, his presence paralyzed what little intellectual powers there were in me, for I was always afraid that I might say something foolish at which he would jeer. He was so severe, so relentless to everybody; he knew so well how to discover, to reveal the ridiculous side in artists, in writers whom I considered superior to myself, and to characterize them by some apt remark unforgetable and fierce, that in his presence I found myself in a state of constant mistrust, of ever present disquietude. I always asked myself: "What does he think of me? What scornful thoughts do I inspire in him?"

I had that feminine curiosity which obsessed me to know what opinion he had of me. By means of distant allusions, absurd affections or hypocritical circumlocutions, I would sometimes try to surprise or provoke him into frankness, and I suffered even more when he deigned to pay me a curt compliment, as one who throws a few pennies to a pauper whom one wishes to be rid of; at least, that is what I imagined. In a word, I liked him very much, I assure you; I was very much devoted to him, but in this affection and in this devotion there was an element of uncertainty, which destroyed the charm of those feelings; there was also a certain grudge which rendered those feelings almost painful, a grudge caused by the sense of my inferiority. Never, not even when I was most intimate with him, was I able to conquer that feeling of base and timid pride, never could I enjoy a friendship which I prized very highly. Lirat, on the other hand, was simple in his relations with me, often affectionate, sometimes "fatherly" in his attentions, and of all his

friends, who were very few in number, I was the only one whose companionship he sought.

Like all those who hold tradition in contempt, like all who rebel against the prejudices of conventional education, against the idiotic formulæ of the School, Lirat was very much discussed; spoken of with contempt — I should rather say. It must be stated also that his conception of free and lofty art conflicted with all the professed conventions and accepted ideas, and that by their forceful synthesis and prodigious knowledge of life which obscured his craftsmanship, his works of art disconcerted the lovers of prettiness and grace and of the frigid correctness of academic unity. The return of modern painting to the great gothic art — this they could never forgive him.

He fashioned the man of today in his craving for enjoyment, a frightfully tortured soul with a body sapped by neurosis, with flesh tormented by lust, which quivers under the influence of passion that lures man on and sinks its claws into his skin. In his representations of the human body wrought in avenging postures, with monstrous apophyses guessed at under the garments, there was such human emphasis, such grief over infernal voluptuousness, such tragic power, that a shudder passed through one's frame when looking at them. It was no longer curly headed, pomaded love, adorned with ribbons and fainting with yearning, rose in mouth, by the light of the moon, or strumming on a guitar under the balcony; it was Love besmirched with blood, drunk with the filth of vice, Love with its onanistic furies, wretched Love which fastens upon man its mouth like a cupping glass and drains his veins, sucks the marrow of his bones and emaciates his frame. And in order to give these representations a still greater intensity of horror, to weigh them down with the burden of even greater affliction, he cast them

in the midst of peaceful, smiling surroundings of surpassing clearness, among pink and blue landscapes with softened vistas, amidst glorious sunshine, with the radiant sea in the background. All around them nature was resplendent with all the magic of her delicate and changing colors.

When for the first time he consented to place his works on a free exhibit, together with a group of friends, the critics and the mob, which influences the critics, shouted with indignation. But the anger did not last very long — for there is a sort of nobility, or generosity in anger—and they merely contented themselves with laughing. Then the humbug which is always represented by mediocre opinion with its foul spittle, this humbug came to replace the menace of raised fists. And viewing the superb artistry of Lirat, they were convulsed with laughter, holding their sides with both hands. Clever, merry-making people deposited pennies on the edge of the frames as one does for a Jack-in-the-box, and this was considered excellent sport — for it actually became a sport for people of the better sort, with purses.

In the magazines, in the studios, in the salons, in the clubs and the cafés the name of Lirat served as a term of comparison, as an indispensable standard whenever one wanted to designate something devoid of sense or some sort of obscenity; it even seemed as if women — and girls too — could not pronounce that reprobate name without blushing. The year-end reviews dragged it into their revolting lampoons, people sang it at the cabarets. Then from these "centres of Parisian culture" it spread to the street — where one saw it blossom forth again into a vulgar bud, upon the sloppy lips of drivers, in the shriveled mouths of street boys, "It's a go, eh! Lirat!" For a few years poor Lirat really enjoyed an uproarious popularity. . .

But one gets tired of everything, even of abusing a person. Paris abandons its puppets which it raises to the throne as quickly as it does its martyrs whom it hoists on the gibbet; in its perpetual hunger for new playthings, it never gets itself excited overly much before the statues of its heroes or at the sight of the blood of its victims.

Now there was only silence for Lirat's portion. It was very seldom indeed that in some of the magazines there was again heard an echo of the past, in the form of some annoying anecdote. Besides, he decided not to exhibit any more, saying:

"Leave me alone in peace!.. Is painting done to be seen..tell me..painting..do you understand?... One works for himself, for two or three living friends and for others whom one has never known and who are dead. . . Poe, Baudelaire, Dostoiewsky, Shakespeare. . . . Shakespeare! . . do you understand? . . . And the rest?... The rest don't amount to anything."

Having reduced his needs to a minimum, he lived on little with admirable and touching dignity. Provided he earned enough with which to buy his brushes, paints, canvas, pay his models and his landlord, make a studying trip each year, he did not wish for more. Money did not tempt him at all, and I am sure that he never sought success. But if success had come to him, I am also sure that Lirat would not have resisted the joy, so human, of relishing factitious delights. Though he did not want to admit it, though he affected to defy injustice gayly, he felt it more keenly than anyone else, and at heart suffered from it cruelly. He suffered from the present neglect shown to him as much as he had suffered from the former insults. Only once did a young critic publish an enthusiastic and high-sounding article about him in a magazine.

The article was well-meant but full of banalities and errors; one could see that its author was not sufficiently familiar with art and that he did not understand anything about the talent of the great artist.

"Have you read it?" Lirat shouted, "have you read it, eh, tell me?... What idiots these critics are! ... If they keep on talking about me, they will finally force me to paint in a cave, understand?... What do they take me for anyway—a vulgarizer?... And then what business is it of this fellow here—whether I make paintings, boots or slippers? . . . That's my private affair!"

Nevertheless he had put it away in a drawer as a thing of great value, and several times I surprised him reading it. It was very well for him to say with supreme detachment, when we were inveighing against the stupidity of the public: "Well, what would you want them to do?... Do you expect the people to start a revolution because I paint my canvases plainly?" But in reality this contempt for notoriety, this apparent resignation concealed deep but secret sentiment. Deep in his very sensitive and very generous soul there accumulated profound aversions, which were vented with terrible and malignant fervor on the whole world. If, on the one hand, his talent had gained in strength and ruggedness on account of this, his character, on the other hand, had lost something of its inherent nobility, and his critical spirit had been deprived of some of its penetrating quality and brilliance.

He ended by giving himself over entirely to decrying everybody and everything, the excess of which threatened to render him odious; at times it bore evidence of nothing but a childishness which made him ridiculous. Great souls nearly always have petty weaknesses — that is a mysterious law of nature, and

Lirat did not escape the effects of this law. Above everything else, he held fast to his well-established reputation of an ill-natured man. He bore very well with the opinion which denied him talent, but what he could not tolerate was that they called in question the propriety of his insulting humanity with his sarcastic jibes.

To avenge the scouring words with which he characterized them, some of the enemies of Lirat attributed to him unnatural vices; others simply called him an epileptic, and these coarse and cowardly calumnies, strengthened every day by ingenious comments, based on "certain" stories which made the rounds of the studios — these calumnies found ready listeners willing, some owing to his actual malice, others prompted solely by the intemperance of the painter's tongue, to receive and spread them.

"You know Lirat?.... He had another attack yesterday, this time on the street."

And names of important personages were mentioned who had assisted in the scene and who had seen him rolling in the mud, lying, with foam at his mouth.

I must confess that I myself at the beginning of our friendship was greatly troubled by these stories. I could not think of Lirat without at the same time picturing to myself horrible fits in which, I was told, he was writhing. Victim of a delusion born of an obsession with this idea, I seemed to discover in him symptoms of horrible diseases; I often imagined that he suddenly became livid, that his mouth was distorted, that his body was convulsed in horrible spasms, that his eyes, wild and streaked with red, were shunning the light and seeking the shadow of deep vacuous space, like the eyes of trapped beasts that are about to die. And I regretted that I did not see him fall, shriek, writhe here in his studio filled with his genius,

under my avid glance that watched him and hoped for the worst!... Poor Lirat!.. And still I loved him!...

The day was drawing to a close. All over Rodrigues place one heard the slamming of doors; the noise of steps upon the street was rapidly dying away, and in the shops voices were heard rising in song at the end of the day's work. Lirat had not uttered a word since resuming his work, except to fix my posture, which I did not keep just the way he wanted.

"The leg a little this way!... A little more now!... Your chest not quite so drawn in!.... You'll excuse me, my dear Mintié, but you pose like a pig!"

He worked now feverishly, now haltingly, mumbling in his mustache, swearing from time to time. His crayon snapped at the canvas with a sort of uneasy haste of angry nervousness.

"Ah, shucks!" he cried out, pushing away the easel with a kick.... I can do nothing but botch-work today!.... The devil take me, one might think I was competing for a prize."

Moving back his chair he examined his sketch with a frigid air and muttered:

"Whenever women come here it's the same old story.... When they go away the women leave you the soul of a Boulanger in the pretty claws of a Henner.... Henner, do you understand?.. Let's go out."

When we were at the end of the street:

"Are you coming to dine with me, Lirat?" I asked him.

"No," he replied in a dry tone, reaching out his hand.

And he walked away, stiff, formal, solemn, with the business air of a deputy who has just discussed the budget.

That evening I did not go out and remained at home to muse in solitude. Stretched on a sofa, with half-closed eyes, and body made torpid by the heat, almost slumbering, I liked to go back to my past, to bring to life things dead and to recall memories which escaped me. Five years had passed since the war — the war in which I began my apprenticeship in life by entering the tormenting profession of a man-killer.... Five years already!... Still it seemed like yesterday ... the smoke, the fields covered with snow, stained with blood and ruins, these fields where, like ghosts, we wandered about piteously, worn out with fatigue.... Only five years!... And when I came back to the Priory, the house was empty, my father dead!... My letters had come to him only rarely, at long intervals and they had always been short, dry, written in haste on the back of my knapsack. Only once, after a night of terrible anguish had I become tender, affectionate; only once had I poured out my heart to him, and this letter which should have brought him sweetness, hope and consolation he had not received!... Every morning, Marie told me, he used to come out to the gate an hour before the arrival of the mailman and watch the turn of the road, a prey to mortal fear. Old wood cutters would pass on their way to the woods; my father used to question them:

"Hey there, uncle Ribot, you have not seen the mailman, by any chance?"

"Why no, Monsieur Mintié — it's a little early yet."

"Oh, no, uncle Ribot, he is rather late."

"That might be, Monsieur Mintié, that might be."

When he noticed the kepi and red collar of the mailman he became pale, trembling with the fear of bad news. As the mailman approached, the heart of my father beat furiously, almost bursting.

"Nothing but magazines today, Monsieur Mintié."

"How is that! . . . No letters at all! You must be mistaken, my boy. Look. . . look again. . . ."

He made the mailman search in his letter bag, untie the bundles and go through them again. . . .

"Nothing! . . . Why it's impossible!

And he would return to the kitchen, seat himself in the rocking chair heaving a sigh:

"Just think of it," he would say to Marie who gave him a bowl of milk, "just think of it, Marie, if his poor mother had been alive!"

During the day, when in town, he used to visit people who had sons in the army; the conversation was always the same.

"Well, have you heard from your boys."

"Why, no, M'sieur Mintié. How about you, have you heard anything from Jean?"

"I haven't either."

"That's very strange. How is it possible? . . . Can you explain it? . . ."

That they themselves did not get any letters only half surprised them, but that Mintié, the mayor, had not received any either, surprised them very much. Most unusual conjectures were made; they turned to the confusing statements of the papers, they questioned old soldiers who told them their war experiences with the most extravagant and lavish details; at the end of a couple of hours, they would part with lighter hearts.

"Don't worry M'sieur Mayor. You'll see him back a colonel, sure."

"Colonel, colonel!" my father would say, shaking his head . . . "I don't ask that much . . . Just so he comes back! . . ."

One day—nobody knew how that happened—Saint-Michel found itself full of Prussian soldiers. The Priory was occupied. Long sabres were found in our

old house. From this moment, my father became more ill than ever, he took fever and was confined to his bed, and in his delirium he repeated without end: "Put the horses to, Felix, put the horses to, for I want to go to Alençon to get some news of Jean!" He imagined himself starting out on the road. "Gid up, gid up, Bichette, gid up, come on!... We are going to have some news of Jean this evening.... Gid up, gid up, come on!.. And my poor father gently breathed his last in the arms of the curé Blanchetière, surrounded by Felix and Marie who were sobbing!... After a six months' stay at the Priory, now sadder than ever, I was weary to death... Old Marie, accustomed to manage the house according to her own notions, was unbearable to me; in spite of her devotion, her whims exasperated me, and there always were long altercations in which I never had the last word. For my only company I had the good curé to whom nothing appealed as much as the profession of a notary. From morning till night he used to lecture to me thus:

"Your grandfather was a notary, so was your father, your uncles, your cousins, in fact your whole family. ... You owe it to yourself, my dear child, not to desert your post. You shall be Mayor of Saint-Michel, you may even hope to replace your poor father at the general council, in a few years.... Why man alive, that's something! And then — take my word for it — times are going to be pretty hard for decent people who love the good Lord.... You see that rascal Lebecq, he is municipal counsellor. All he thinks of is how to rob and kill people, that brigand there.... We need at the head of our country a right-minded man to uphold religion and defend the principles of righteousness.... Paris, Paris!... Oh! these silly heads, those youngsters!... But will you

please tell me what good you have accomplished at Paris?... Why, the very air there is infected! Look at big Mange, he comes from a good family, but that did not prevent him from coming back from Paris with a red cap on. Isn't that a pretty affair?"

And he would continue in this vein for hours, taking his snuff, evoking the vision of the red cap of big Mange which appeared to him more abominable than the horns of the devil.

What was there to do at Saint-Michel? There was no one to whom I could communicate my thoughts, my dreams; there was no outlet for the ardor of life where I could expend that intellectual energy, that passion for knowledge and for creative work which the war, in developing my muscles, in strengthening my body, had awakened in me, and which omnivorous reading overstimulated in me more and more every day. I realized that Paris alone, which formerly had frightened me so much, that Paris alone could furnish nourishment for ambitions, as yet indefinite, which spurred me on, and with the estate settled, and the library sold I left suddenly, leaving the Priory to the care of Felix and Marie.... And here I am back in Paris!...

What have I accomplished during these five years, to use the words of the curé?... Carried away by vague ardors, by confused enthusiasm which blended together some sort of a chimeric ideal with a kind of impracticable apostleship, how far did I get?... I am no longer the timid child whom the footmen, in the vestibule flooded with light, used to put to flight. If I have not acquired much self-assurance, I at least know how to behave in society without appearing too ridiculous. I pass pretty much unnoticed, a condition which is the best that could be wished for a man of my

calibre who possesses none of the graces and qualities which are necessary to shine there.

Very often I ask myself: what am I doing here in this society to which I do not belong, where they respect only success however fraudulently obtained, only money, no matter from what filthy place it comes; where every spoken word acts as a wound inflicted on everything I love best and everything I admire most? . . . Besides, is not man with all his differences of education which are betrayed only in his gestures, in his manner of greeting, in his more or less graceful bearing, pretty much the same no matter where he is?... What! were these the high-spirited artists, the much admired writers whose glory is sung, whose genius is acclaimed... these petty, vulgar, frightfully pedantic beings, slavishly aping the manners of the society they rail at, ludicrously vain, fiercely jealous, lying prostrate before wealth, and kneeling in the dust, worshipping publicity — that old blackguard, which they carry about on velvet cushions. . . . Oh, how much better I love the herdsmen and their oxen, the pig drivers and their pigs, yes the pigs, round and pink, digging the earth with their snouts and whose fat smooth backs reflect the clouds that float above!

I read excessively, without discrimination, without system, and from this faulty reading there was left in my mind nothing but a chaos of disjointed facts and incomplete ideas, from the tangle of which I did not know how to extricate myself.... I tried to acquire knowledge in every way, but I realized that I was just as ignorant today as I had been in the past.... I had had mistresses whom I loved for a week, sentimental and romantic blondes, fierce brunettes, impatient to be caressed, and love showed me only the frightful emptiness of the human heart, the deceptiveness of

affection, the lie of the ideal, the nothingness of pleasure....

Believing myself converted to the formulæ of descriptive art by means of which I was going to harness my ambition and fix my shifting and thrilling dreams upon the pinion of words, I had published a book which was praised and which proved to be "a best seller." Of course, I was flattered by this little success; I, too, spoke of myself with pride as of a rare talent; I, too, gave myself superior airs in order to deceive others all the better. And wishing to deceive myself as well, I often looked upon myself in the mirror with the complacency of a comedian, in order that I might discover certain marks of genius in my eyes, on my forehead, in the majestic bearing of my head.

Alas! Success rendered yet more painful the inner knowledge of my impotence. My book did not amount to much; its style was forced, its conception infantile: a passionate harangue, an absurd phraseology took the place of ideas in it. At times I would read over the passages praised by the critics, and in those passages discover something of everybody: Herbert Spencer and Scribe, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Commerson, Victor Hugo, Poe and Eugene Chavette. Of my own contribution, I, whose name was displayed on the title page, on the yellow cover of the volume, found nothing. Following the caprices of my memories, aroused by the intermittent light of my recollections, I expressed the thoughts of one and used the style of another; none of the ideas or style belonged to me. And important looking persons whose tastes are infallible and whose judgment is law praised my personality, my originality, the unexpected nature and subtleness of my impressions!...

How sad it was!... Whither was I going? I knew

no more about it today than I did yesterday. I had the conviction that I could not be a writer, because all the effort of which I was capable had been spent in writing that miserable and incoherent book. Had I had a more humble and compromising ambition, were I only prompted by desires less noble, by those which never cause remorse — such as love of money, official titles, dissoluteness!... But, no! Only one thing which I could never attain lured me, and that was talent... To be able to say to myself, yes... to say to myself: "This book, this sonnet, this phrase is yours, you wrung it from your brains swollen with passion; it is your thought that quivers here; it is pieces of your flesh and drops of your blood, that it scatters over the sorrowful pages; it is your nerves that vibrate in it like the strings of a violin under the bow of a divine musician. What you have accomplished here is beautiful and grand!" For this moment of supreme joy I would be willing to sacrifice my future, my wealth, my life; I would be willing even to kill!...

And never, never will I be able to say that to myself!... Ah how I envied the eternal self-contentment of the mediocre!... Now I again felt a passionate desire to return to Saint-Michel. I wished I could drive the plough in the brown furrow, roll in the fields of yellow clover, smell the wholesome odor of the stables, and, above all, lose myself in the thick of the coppice wood, penetrating into it farther and farther....

The light went out and my lamp was smoking. A cold like a gentle caress filled my legs and sent a current of pleasurable chills through my back. Outside not a sound was heard; the street grew silent. It had been long since I heard the dull trundle of the omnibus rolling on the causeway. The clock struck

six. But a sort of laziness kept me glued to my sofa: while thus stretched out I felt a physical pleasure amidst a great mental depression. I had to make a strenuous effort to free myself from this languor and to go into my bedroom. I found it impossible to fall asleep. No sooner did I close my eyes than it seemed to me that I had been thrown into a black and very deep pit, and suddenly I awoke, panting and perspiring. I again lit my lamp, tried to read.... I could not concentrate my mind on the lines of the text which seemed to swerve, to cross one another, to abandon themselves to a fantastic dance under my very eyes.

What a stupid life mine is!... Why am I so different, preyed upon by obnoxious chimeras? Who has poured into my soul this deadly poison of weariness and discouragement? Before others there stretches a vast horizon illumined by the sun! But I am walking in the darkness, stopped on every side by walls which obstruct my way and against which I vainly beat my head and knees.... Perhaps it is because they possess love! Love, ah yes! If I could only love!

And again I saw the beautiful virgin of Saint-Michel, the radiant virgin of plaster of paris with its robe adorned with stars and its golden nimbus descending from heaven. All around her suns were revolving, inclining themselves like celestial flowers, and doves in the exaltation of prayers were flying about, brushing her with their wings.... I recalled the ecstasies, the fits of mystic adoration which she evoked in me; all the sweet joys which I had experienced came back to me at the mere contemplation of her. Did she not also speak to me, then, at the chapel? And those unuttered words which poured into my childish soul such ineffable tenderness, this language more harmonious than angels' voices and the music of golden harps, this language more fragrant than the

perfume of roses,— was it not the divine language of love?

As I listened with all my senses to this language which was music to me, I was lifted into a world unknown and wondrous; a new enchanted life sprouted, burst into bud and flourished all around me. The horizon receded into mysterious infinity: space shone bright like the interior of the sun, and I felt myself growing so tall and strong that in one embrace I was pressing to my breast all the beings, all the flowers, all the swarms of creatures born of the glance of love exchanged between the Holy Virgin of plaster and a little child.

"Holy Virgin, kindly Virgin!" I cried. "Speak to me, speak to me again,— as you used to in the past, in the chapel.... And give me love once more, for love is life and I am dying because I am no longer able to love."

But the Virgin was not listening to me any longer. She glided into the chamber and curtsying, mounted the chairs, pried into the furniture pieces, singing strange airs all the time. A drawn bonnet of otter skin now replaced her nimbus of gold, her eyes became like those of Juliette Roux, very large, very sweet, which smiled at me from a plaster face under a veil of very fine gauze. From time to time she approached my bed, waving above me her embroidered handkerchief which exhaled a violent perfume.

"Monsieur Mintié," she said, "I am at home every day from five to seven. And I shall be delighted to see you, delighted!"

"Virgin, kindly Virgin!" I implored again. "Speak to me, please. Speak to me as you did formerly in the chapel."

"Tu, tu, tu, tu!" hummed the Virgin who, causing her lilac robe to swell out and removing her cloak,

adorned with golden stars with the tips of her long, thin fingers, began to turn around slowly as if dancing a waltz, her head swaying from one side to the other.

"Good Virgin!" I repeated in a rather irritated voice, "why don't you speak to me!"

She stopped, posted herself in front of me, stripped off her plaster garments one after another, and entirely nude, lustful and magnificent, her bosom shook with clear, sonorous, precipitous laughter:

"Monsieur Mintié," she said, "I am at home every day from five to seven. And I'll give you Charles' old trousers." And she threw her otter skin bonnet at me.

I sat up on my bed.... With a stupid gaze and breathing with difficulty, I looked about me. But the room was quiet, the lamp continued to burn sadly and my open book was lying on the carpet.

The next morning I got up late, having slept badly, pursued by the thought of Juliette in my sleep disturbed by nightmares. During the remainder of that troubled, feverish night she did not leave me for an instant, assuming the most extravagant forms, abandoning herself to the most wretched pranks, and lo! I again beheld her in the morning, and this time she was the same as when I met her before at Lirat's, with her air of modesty, her discreet and charming manners.

I felt a kind of sadness — not exactly sadness, but regret, the regret one feels at the sight of a rose-bush whose roses have wilted and whose petals are scattered over the muddy ground. For I could not think of Juliette without thinking at the same time of Lirat's malignant words: "There was also an affair with a wrestler of Neuilly whom she gave twenty francs." What a pity! . . . When she entered the studio I could swear that she was the most virtuous of women.... Her very manner of walking, greeting,

smiling, seating herself bespoke good breeding, a peaceful, happy life without hasty acts of indiscretion, without degrading remorse. Her hat, her cloak, her dress, her whole appearance was of a refined and charming elegance, meant for the enjoyment of just one, for the cheerfulness of a secluded house, closed to the seekers of unclean spoils.... And her eyes, radiating a perfectly legitimate tenderness, her eyes from which shone such candor, so much sincerity, which seemed to have no knowledge of lies, her eyes more beautiful than the lakes haunted by the moon!...

"Is Charles all right?" Lirat had asked.

Charles? . . . Her husband, to be sure! . . . And naïvely I pictured to myself a respectable interior of a room, with jolly children playing on the carpet, a family lamp, grouping kind and simple beings around its gentle shimmer; a chaste bed, protected by a crucifix and a hallowed branch of boxtree!... Then suddenly, crashing into this peace, the bullhead from the Bouffes, the croupier of the gambling club, and Charles Malterre who broke Lirat's lounge by rolling on it, while crying in rage! . . . I conjured the image of the comedian — a pallid face, wrinkled, glabrous, with impudent bloodshot eyes, with sensual lips, wearing an open collar, a pink cravat, a low-plaited short jacket!

I was unnerved and irritated. . . . What did it matter to me, after all? Did the life of this woman concern me, was it related to me in any way? . . . Was it my business to interest myself in the fate of women whom chance threw in my path? . . . I don't care what she is, this Mlle. Juliette Roux! . . . She is neither my sister nor my fiancée, nor my friend; there is not a single bond of kinship between us. . . . If I had seen her yesterday walking on the street, like one of the thousands of persons whom one brushes against

every day and who pass on and vanish, she would have already been drawn into the vortex of oblivion and never again would I be likely to see her.

"Maybe Lirat is mistaken?" I repeated, while breakfasting. I knew his exaggerations, his passion for ridicule, his horror of and contempt for woman. What he said of Juliette he was saying of all other women. Who knows,— perhaps this comedian, this croupier, all the details of this ignominious affair in the exposure of which his spiteful spirit found gratification, existed only in his imagination? And Charles Malterre?

Undoubtedly I should have preferred to see her married. I should have been pleased to see her leaning openly on the arm of a man, respected, envied by the most honest! But she loved this Malterre, she lived decently with him, she was devoted to him: "Charles will be sorry to learn of your refusal." The almost entreating voice in which she said those words was still in my ears. This means that she was mindful of the things that might or might not please Malterre.

And at the thought that Lirat, in making improper use of a false situation, was calumniating her in an odious manner, my heart grew heavy, a feeling of great pity swept over me and I caught myself saying aloud: "Poor girl!" Still this Malterre had been writhing on the lounge, he had cried, he had laid bare his heart to Lirat, had shown him her letters. Well, what of it? What have I to do with this woman? Let her have all the singers, all the croupiers, all the wrestlers she wants! To hell with her! And I went out humming a gay air, with the free bearing of a gentleman whose spirit is not in the least troubled by anything. And why should it be, I ask you? . . .

I went down the boulevards, stopping in front of

the booths, strolling in spite of the sun, which was like a niggardly and pallid smile of December still permeated with fog; the air was cold and piercing. On the sidewalk women were passing, shivering with cold, wrapped in long cloaks of otter skin, some of them dressed in small drawn bonnets of fur like Juliette's, and every time these cloaks and bonnets attracted my attention I observed them with genuine pleasure. I liked to follow them with my glance until they were lost in the crowd. At the corner of the Rue Taitbout, I remember, I came upon a tall slender woman, pretty and resembling Juliette so closely that I brought my hand to my hat ready to greet her. I was excited — oh, it was not the violent beating of the heart which halts your breathing, weakens the flow of blood in your veins and stuns you; it was a light touch, a caress, something very sweet, which brings a smile upon the lips and a cheerful surprise to the eyes.

But this woman was not Juliette. I felt somewhat peeved and avenged myself by thinking her very ugly. Two o'clock already! . . . Shall I go to see Lirat? Why? To make him talk about Juliette, to compel him to admit that he had lied to me, to make him tell me of her traits of character, sublime and poignant, tell me some touching stories of her devotion, sacrifice — that tempted me. I thought the matter over, however, knowing that Lirat would be angry, that he would mock at me, at her, and I had a horror of his sarcasms; I already heard sinister words, abominable phrases coming out of a twisted corner of his mouth with a hissing sound.

At the Champs-Elysées, I called a hackney-coach and proceeded toward the Bois. Why dissemble? There I hoped to meet Juliette. Yes, certainly I hoped it, but at the same time I feared it. Not to see

her at all, I felt, would prove a disappointment to me. On the other hand, were she in the habit of exhibiting herself in this market place of gallantry regularly like the other ladies, I should again feel hurt, and in the end I did not know what it was that stirred me more: the hope of seeing her or the fear of meeting her.

There were few people in the Bois. On the grand lake drive, carriages were passing slowly at a considerable distance from one another, the drivers perched high upon their seats. Sometimes a brougham would leave the strung-out line, turn and disappear to the trot of its horses, carrying away God knows where the profile of a woman, or some white and pallid faces, or the end of a ruffled dress seen for a moment through the window of the coach door. . . . My heart and the blood in my temples were beating faster, impatience caused the tips of my fingers to twitch; my neck was tired from turning in the same direction in an effort to penetrate the shadow of the carriages and began to hurt; anxiously I was chewing the end of a cigar which I could not make up my mind to light, for fear of missing her carriage in the act. Once I thought I saw her inside a brougham, which was going in the opposite direction.

"Turn, turn," I shouted to the driver, "and follow that brougham."

I did not at all reflect whether or not I was acting properly towards a woman to whom I had been introduced only the day before, and casually at that, one whose reputation I wanted to see rehabilitated at all costs. Half leaning against the lowered window of the coach door, I never lost sight of the brougham. And I was saying to myself: "Perhaps she recognized me! Perhaps she is going to stop, get out of the carriage, appear in the street." Indeed, I was saying this to myself without the slightest notion of attempting

a gallant conquest. I was saying that as if it were the simplest and most natural thing in the world. The brougham rolled on speedily, lightly, bounding on its springs, and my hackney coach followed it with difficulty.

"Faster!" I gave the order, "faster, and get ahead of it!"

The driver lashed his horse, which started into a gallop, and in a few seconds the wheels of the two carriages touched each other. Then a woman's head, with dishevelled hair under a very large hat, with a nose comically turned up, with lips cracked from the excessive use of paint and crimson like a living flesh wound, appeared in the frame of the coach door. With a scornful glance, she took in the driver, the cab, the horse and myself, put out her tongue and then withdrew into a corner of her carriage. It was not Juliette! I did not come home until night, very much disappointed and yet delighted with my useless drive!

I had no plans for the evening. Still I spent more than the usual time in dressing myself. I did it with the greatest care, and, for the first time, the knot of my cravat seemed to me a matter of great importance, and I was very much absorbed in the process of tying it carefully. This unexpected discovery brought in its train others equally important. For example, I noticed that my shirt was ill cut, that the shirt front wrinkled disgracefully at the opening of the vest; that my dress coat looked very old and curiously out of style. In a word, I thought I looked very ridiculous and promised myself to change all that in the future. Without making elegant appearance an exacting and tyrannical law of my life, it was quite permissible, I thought, to look like the rest of the people. Simply because one dressed well, one was not necessarily a fool.

These preoccupations consumed my time till the dinner hour. Usually I ate at home, but this evening my apartment appeared to me so small, so dismal; it suffocated me, and I felt the need of space, of noise, of merriment.

At the restaurant I took an interest in everything: the coming and going of people, the gilding on the ceiling, the large mirrors which multiplied to infinity the parlors, waiters, electric globes, the flowers on ladies hats, the counters on which were spread dressed meats of all kinds, where pyramids of fruit, red and gold colored, rose amid salads and sparkling glassware. I watched the women above all, I studied their somewhat airy manner of eating, the joy in their eyes, the movement of their ungloved arms encircled by heavy bracelets of glittering gold, the exposed lines of their necks so delicate and tender, which gradually receded into the bosom, under the roseate lace napkin. This fascinated me, it affected me like something altogether new, like a landscape of some distant country suddenly glimpsed. I was wonder-struck, like a boy.

Ordinarily, impelled by the brooding disposition of my nature, I would fasten my attention on the intimate moral life of a human being, that is to say, I would point out its ugliness or suffering; at this moment, on the contrary, I abandoned myself to the joy of solely perceiving its physical charm: I was delighted to observe the magic spell cast by the women; even in the ugliest one I found some little detail such as a curve in the back of a neck, a languor in eyes, a suppleness of hands — always something or other — which made me happy, and I reproached myself for having until now arranged my life so badly, for having isolated myself like a barbarian in a dark melancholy chamber, for not having lived, while all this time Paris

was offering me, at every step, joys so easily attained and so sweet to relish.

"Is Monsieur perhaps waiting for someone?" the waiter asked me.

Some one? Why no, I was not waiting for anyone. The door of the restaurant opened and I quickly turned around. Then I understood why the waiter had asked that question. Each time the door opened I would hastily turn around as I did just now and would stare anxiously at the people entering as if I knew that someone was about to enter, someone I was waiting for. . . . Some one! Well, for whom could I be waiting?

I very seldom went to the theatre; to force me there, a special occasion or obligation or inducement was required. I quite believe that of my own accord I would never think of going there. I even affected a supreme contempt for the kind of literary stuff offered for sale in these pushcart markets of mediocrity. Conceiving, as I did, the theatre as a place not of idle distraction but of serious art, it was repugnant to me to see human passion warbling one and the same sentimental tune amidst the mechanism of always identical scenes, to see gaiety, bedecked with tinsel, tumbling into the same pit of tomfoolery. A manufacturer of such plays, be they ever so applauded, seemed to me an artist gone astray; he bore the same relation to the poet that an unfrocked clergyman bears to a priest, or a deserter does to a soldier!

And I always remembered Lirat's remark, so powerfully concise, so profoundly discerning. We had been attending the funeral of the painter M———. The celebrated dramatist D——— was the chief mourner. At the cemetery he delivered an address. This did not surprise anyone, for did not H——— and D——— enjoy a reputation of equal greatness? At

the end of the ceremony Lirat took my arm and we walked back to Paris very sad. Lirat, who seemed lost in painful meditation, was silent. Suddenly he stopped, crossed his arms and, swaying his head with an irresistibly comical air because it was intended to be grave, exclaimed: "But why did that fellow D——— interfere, tell me?" And he was right. Why did he interfere, really? Did they come from the same stock and were they headed for the same glory — the one an ardent artist with grandiose thoughts and immortal works, and the other, whose sole ideal was to entertain with silly nonsense an assembly of wealthy and reputable bourgeois each evening. Yes, really, why did he interfere?

How removed I was from such morose sentiments when, after dinner, having sauntered along the boulevards, enjoying the feeling of physical well-béing which gave to my movement a special lightness and elasticity, I seated myself in a chair at the Varieté, where a successful musical comedy was being played! With my face deliciously freshened by the cold air outside, my heart entirely won over to a sort of universal forebearance, I was really enjoying myself. With what? I did not know and little cared to know, not being in the mood for psychological self-analysis.

As was proper, I arrived during the intermission, when the crowd, very elegant in appearance, was filling the lobbies. After having left my overcoat at the check room, I passed through the parterre boxes with that same sweet impatience, that same delicious anguish, which I had already experienced at the Bois; on reaching the first balcony I continued the same careful inspection of the loges. "Why is she not here?" I asked myself. Each time I failed to distinguish clearly a woman's face, whether it was because the face was slightly bent, in shadow, or cut

off from view by a fan, I would say to myself: "That's Juliette!" And each time it was not Juliette at all. The play amused me; I laughed heartily at the flat jokes which constituted the essence of the piece: I enjoyed all this perverse ineptitude, this vulgar coarseness and really found in it a quality of irony which did not lack literary merit. At the love scenes I grew sentimental. During the last intermission I met a young man whom I scarcely knew. Glad of the opportunity to pour out the banalities which had accumulated in me and were pressing for an outlet, I clung to him.

"An amazing thing, isn't it?" he said to me. "It is stunning, eh?"

"Yes, it isn't bad!"

"Not bad! Not bad! . . . Why that is a masterpiece, an astounding masterpiece! What I especially like is the second act. There is a situation for you, not that . . . a tense situation! Why it is high comedy, you know! And the gowns! And that Judic, ah! that Judic! . . ."

He struck his thigh and clicked his tongue:

"It got me all excited, my dear! It's astonishing!"

We thus discussed the merits of the various acts, scenes and actors.

When we were parting:

"Tell me," I asked him, "do you happen to know a certain Juliette Roux?"

"Wait now! Oh, perfectly well! A little brunette, very 'chic'? No, I got mixed up. Wait now! Juliette Roux! Don't know her."

An hour later I was seated at a table with a glass of soda water in front of me, in the café de la Paix where, after the theatre, used to assemble the most beautiful representatives of the fashionable world. A great many women came in and out, insolent, loud-mouthed, their

faces covered with fresh layers of rice powder, their lips newly painted with rouge! At the adjoining table a little blond lady, already aged but very animated, was speaking in a nasal voice; a brunette, farther away, was simpering with a turkey's ludicrous majesty, and with the same hand which had raked manure on the farm she held a fan, while her escort, leaning against his chair, his hat pushed back, his legs spread apart, was obdurately sucking his cane's head.

An uncontrollable feeling of disgust rose within me; I was ashamed of being here, and I compared the ridiculous and noisy manners of these women with the reserved deportment of the gentle Juliette at Lirat's studio. These raucous and piercing voices rendered even more suave the freshness of her voice, the voice which I still heard saying to me: "Delighted, Monsieur! But I know you well." I arose.

"What a scoundrel this Lirat is, all the same," I exclaimed while getting into bed, furious at the fact that he had so treated a young woman whom I had met neither on the street, at the Bois, in the restaurant, at the theatre, nor at the night cabaret.

CHAPTER IV

"MADAME JULIETTE ROUX, if you please?"

"Will Monsieur please come in?" the maid asked.

Without demanding my name or waiting for my answer, she made me cross a small, dark antechamber, and led me into a room where at first I could only distinguish a lamp covered by a large lamp-shade, which burned low in a corner. The maid raised the flame of the lamp and carried out an otter skin cape which had been thrown on the sofa.

"I will go tell madame," she said.

And she disappeared, leaving me alone in the room.

So I was at her house! For eight days the thought of this visit had tortured me. I had no special business, I simply wanted to see Juliette; some kind of keen curiosity, which I did not stop to analyze, drew me to her. Several times I had gone to the Rue Saint Petersbourg with the firm intention of calling on her, but at the last moment my nerve failed me, and I left without mustering sufficient courage to cross her threshold. And now I was the most embarrassed being in the world, and I regretted my foolish step, for obviously it was a foolish step. How would she receive me? What should I say? What caused me the greatest uneasiness was that after I had made a thorough search in my brain I found not a single phrase, not a single word with which to begin our conversation when Juliette entered. What if words should fail me and I should be left standing here with gaping mouth! How ridiculous that would be!

I examined the room into which Juliette was pres-

ently to come. It was a dressing room which also served as a parlor. It made a rather unfavorable impression on me. The toilet table, ostentatiously displayed with its two wash basins of cracked, pink cut glass, shocked me. The walls and ceiling, hung with loud red satin, the furniture, bordered with elaborate plush hangings, the knick-knacks, costly and ugly, placed here and there on the furniture, the queer tables serving no apparent purpose, consols weighed down with heavy ornaments — all this bespoke a vulgar taste. I noticed in the center of the mantlepiece, between two massive vases of onyx, a terra-cotta statuette of Cupid, smiling with a sort of grimace and offering a flower held at the tips of his outspread fingers. Every detail revealed, on the one hand, a love of expensive and unrefined luxury, and on the other a regrettable predilection for romance and puerile affection. It was at once distressing and sentimental. Nevertheless, and that was a relief to me, I saw here no evidence of that incongruity, that transitory air, that severity of aspect so characteristic of ladies' boarding houses, those apartments where one is made aware of a haggard existence, where by the number of knick-knacks one can count the number of lovers who have passed there, lovers for an hour, a night, a year; where every chair tells of the lack of decency, the unfaithfulness; where on the glass one can see the tragedy of fortune's fickleness; on the marble, traces of a tear still warm; on the candlestick, blood drops still moist. The door opened and Juliette appeared wearing a white, long flowing dress. I trembled, color came to my face; but she recognized me and, smiling that smile of hers which at last I found again, she stretched out her hand.

"Ah! Monsieur Mintié!" she said, "how nice of

you not to have forgotten me! Has it been long since you saw that eccentric Lirat?"

"Why, yes, Madame, I have not seen him since the day I had the honor of meeting you at his place."

"Ah, my God, I though you two never separated at all."

"It is true," I replied, "that I see him quite often. But I have been working all these days."

As I thought I detected a note of irony in the sound of her voice, I added, to provoke her:

"What a great artist, isn't he?"

Juliette let this remark pass unanswered.

"So you are always working?" She took up the subject again. "For the rest, I am told you live like a regular recluse. Really, one sees very little of you, Monsieur Mintié!"

The conversation took a quite ordinary turn, the theatre furnishing food for nearly all of it. A remark which I made seemed to astound her, and she was rather scandalized.

"What, you don't like the theatre? Is it possible — and you an artist? I am passionately fond of it. The theatre is so amusing! We are going to the Varieté tonight, for the fourth time, mind you."

A feeble yelp came from behind the door.

"Ah, my God!" Juliette exclaimed, hurriedly rising. "My Spy whom I left in my room! Shall I present Spy to you, Monsieur Mintié? Don't you know Spy?"

She opened the door, drew aside the hangings, which were very wide.

"Come, Spy!" she said coaxingly. "Where have you been, Spy? Come over here, poor thing!"

And I saw a diminutive little animal, with a pointed snout, long ears, advancing, dancing on its thin paws that resembled a spider's legs and whose whole body,

bent and skinny, quivered as though in fever. A ribbon of red silk, carefully tied on the side, encircled its neck in place of a collar.

"Come on, Spy. Say hello to Monsieur Mintié!"

Spy turned on me his round, stupid and cruel eyes which were on a level with his head, and barked viciously.

"That's right, Spy. Now give your paw. Will you give me your paw? Come, now!"

Juliette bent down and threatened the dog with her finger. Spy finally put his paw in his mistress' hand. She picked him up, patted and embraced him.

"Oh! the dear little dog! Oh, darling dog! Oh, my love, my dearest Spy!"

She sat up again, still holding the dog in her arms like a child, rubbing her cheek against the snout of the frightful beast, whispering caressing and endearing words into his ears.

"Now show us that you are pleased, Spy! Show it to your little mammy!"

Spy barked again, then licked the lips of Juliette who joyously abandoned herself to these odious caresses.

"Ah, what a dear you are, Spy! Ah, how very, very nice you are!"

And addressing herself to me, whom she seemed to have forgotten completely since Spy's unfortunate entry, she suddenly asked:

"Do you like dogs, Monsieur Mintié?"

"Very much, Madame," I answered.

Then she told me, with a wealth of childish detail, the history of Spy, his habits, his urgent needs, his tricks, the scraps with the housekeeper who could not stand him.

"But you ought to see him when he is asleep," she said to me. "You know he has a bed, sheets, an

eiderdown coverlet, like a real person. Every night I put him to bed. And his little head looks so funny on it, all black. Aren't you very funny, Monsieur Spy?"

Spy chose a comfortable place on Juliette's dress, and, after turning several times, rolled himself into a black lump, almost entirely lost in the cloth's silken folds.

"That's it! By-by, Spy, my little baby!"

During this long conversation with Spy, I had a chance to observe Juliette at leisure. She was indeed very beautiful, even more beautiful than I had dreamed she was under her veil. Her face was truly radiant. It had such freshness, such an aurora-like clearness, that the very air about her seemed illumined. Whenever she turned or bent forward I saw her thick hair, very dark, descending along her dress in an enormous tress, which added something peculiarly virginal and youthful to her appearance. I thought I saw a perpendicular, wilful wrinkle furrowed in the middle of her forehead, at the root of her hair, but it was visible only in certain instances of light reflection, and the luminous sweetness of her eyes, the extremely graceful curve of her mouth tempered its rigid aspect. One felt that under her ample garments quivered a supple, nervous body of passionate pliancy; what delighted me most were her hands, delicate, deft and of surprising agility, whose every movement, even of indifference or anger, was a caress.

It was hard for me to form a definite opinion of her. There was in this woman a mixture of innocence and voluptuousness, of shrewdness and stupidity, of kindness and malevolence, which was disconcerting. And a curious thing! At one moment I saw the horrible image of the singer at the Bouffes taking shape near her. And this image formed Juliette's shadow, so to

speak. Far from vanishing, this image, as I looked at it, was assuming in some way a fixed corporeal form. It grimaced, wriggled, leaped with lurid contortions, its foul, obscene lips distended toward Juliette, who seemed to draw the image toward herself and whose hand sank in its hair and passed tremblingly along its body, happy to sully herself with its impure contact. And the sordid juggler was removing Juliette's clothes and showing her to me in a swoon, in the wretched splendor of sin! I had to shut my eyes and make a painful effort to dispel this abominable image, and Juliette immediately assumed her expression of enigmatic, candid tenderness.

"And above all, come to see me, often, very often," she said, seeing me to the door, while Spy, who had followed her into the antechamber, barked and danced on his thin, spider legs.

Outside, I felt the return of a sudden and passionate affection for Lirat and, reproaching myself for being sulky with him, I resolved to ask him to dine with me that very evening. On my way from the Rue Saint Petersbourg to the Boulevard de Courcelles where Lirat lived, I made some bitter reflections. The visit had disillusioned me, I was no longer under the spell of a dream and I quickly returned to desolate reality, to the denial of love. What I had imagined about Juliette was quite vague.

My spirit, exalted by her beauty, was ascribing to her moral qualities and mental attainments which I could not define and which I assumed were extraordinary, the more so since Lirat, by attributing to her, without reason, a dishonorable existence and shameful proclivities, had made her a veritable martyr in my eyes, and my heart was moved. Pushing this folly still further, I thought that by some sort of irresistible sympathy she would confide her suffering to me, the

grave and sorrowful secrets of her soul; I already saw myself consoling her, speaking to her of duty, virtue, resignation. I looked forward to a series of solemn and touching things.

Instead of all this poesy — a frightful dog who barked at my feet and a woman just like others, without brains, without ideas, occupied solely with pleasures, confining her enthusiasm to the Théâtre des Varietés and the caressing of her Spy, her Spy! . . . Ha! Ha! Ha! . . . Her Spy whom she loved with the tenderness and devotion of a porter! And on my way I kicked the air, at an imaginary Spy and, imitating Juliette's voice, was saying: "Come, dear! Oh, dear little dog! Oh, my love, my dearest Spy!" Shall I admit it, I also had a grudge against her for not having said a word about my book. That no one spoke about it in ordinary life was almost a matter of indifference to me. But a compliment from her would have delighted me! I would have felt so happy to know that she had been moved by some page, provoked by another, as I hoped she had been. And instead — nothing! Not even an allusion! Yet, I remember, I had cleverly furnished her with an opportunity for such consideration.

"Decidedly, she is a goose!" I said to myself as I rapped at Lirat's door.

Lirat received me with open arms.

"Ah! my little Mintié!" he exclaimed, "it's very nice of you to come to dine with me. And you have come just in time, I tell you. We are going to have cabbage soup."

He rubbed his hands, and seemed very happy. He wanted to help me remove my overcoat and hat and, dragging me into the small room which served as his parlor, he repeated:

"My little Mintié, I am so glad to see you. Will you come tomorrow to the studio?"

"Surely."

"Well, you shall see! You shall see! First of all, I am going to give up painting, do you understand?"

"Are you going into business?"

"Listen to me! Painting is humbug, my little Mintié."

He grew animated, moved about the room briskly, waving his arms.

"Giotto! Mantegna! Velasques! Rembrandt! Well, Rembrandt! Watteau! Delacroix! Ingres! Yes and then who? No, that is not true? Painting depicts nothing, expresses nothing, it's all humbug! It's all right for the art critics, bankers, and generals who have their portraits on horseback with a howitzer shell exploding in the foreground. But to render a glimpse of the sky, the shade of a flower, the ripple of the water, the air,— you understand? The air — all this impalpable and invisible nature, with a paste of paint colors! With a paste of paint colors?"

Lirat shrugged his shoulders.

"With a paste of paint colors coming out of tubes, with a paste of paint colors made by the dirty hands of chemists, with a paste of paint colors, heavy, opaque and which sticks to the fingers like jelly! Tell me . . . painting . . . what humbug! No, but you will admit, my little Mintié, that it is humbug! A drawing, an engraving, a two-tone piece . . . that's the thing! That does not deceive, it's honest . . . the amateurs sneer at that kind of work and don't presume to bother you about it . . . it evokes no empty enthusiasm in their 'salons'! But real art, majestic art, artistic art is there. Sculpture . . . yes . . . when it is beautiful, it shakes you. . . . But next to it is the art of drawing, drawing . . . my little Mintié, with-

out Prussian blue, just plain drawing! Will you come to my studio tomorrow?"

"Certainly."

He continued to chop his phrases, fumble his words, excited by their very sound.

"I am beginning a series of etchings. You'll see! A nude woman, coming out of a deep shadow, carried upward on the wings of a beast. Scattered about, in unnatural positions, are parts of human corpses with dirty folds and swellings of decaying flesh . . . a belly cut open and losing its viscera, a belly of terrible outline, hideous and true! A dead head, but a living dead head, you understand? Greedy, gluttonous, all lips. She is rising in front of a crowd of old men in tall hats, silk coats and white cravats. She is rising and the old men bend toward her panting, with hanging jaws, watering mouths, contracted eyes . . . all have lewd faces!"

Stopping before me with an air of defiance, he continued:

"And do you know what I am going to call it? Do you know? I am going to call it Love, my little Mintié. What do you think of it? . . ."

"That seems to me a little bit too symbolic," I ventured.

"Symbolic!" interrupted Lirat. "You are talking nonsense, my little Mintié! Symbolic! Why that's life itself! Let's go out and eat."

Our dinner was a very gay affair; Lirat displayed a charming disposition; he was full of original ideas, without extremes or paradoxes, on art. He had again found his normal self, as in the better days of his life. Several times I had a notion to tell him that I had seen Juliette. A kind of shame held me back; I had not the courage.

"Work, work, my little Mintié," he said to me,

when we were parting. "To create, always to create, to draw from one's sinews or from one's brains no matter what . . . be it only a pair of rubbers. There is nothing outside of that!"

Six days later I went again to Juliette and gradually I formed the habit of calling regularly and spending an hour before dinner. The disagreeable impression left on me at the time of my first visit had vanished. Little by little, without suspecting it, I grew so used to the red tapestry in her parlor, to the terra cotta statue of Cupid, to Juliette's childish prating, even to Spy who had become my friend, that whenever I passed a day without seeing her, it seemed as though a great void had been created in my life.

Not only did the things which at first had shocked me no longer do so, but, on the contrary, they now moved me, and each time Juliette talked to Spy or attended to him with exaggerated care, it was a positive pleasure to me, appearing as an added proof of the simplicity and affectionate qualities of her heart. In the end I, too, began to speak this dog language. One evening, when Spy was sick, I grew uneasy and, removing the covers and quilts which covered him, I gently murmured: "Baby Spy has a hurt; where does it hurt our little baby?" Only the image of the singer, rising near Juliette, somewhat disturbed the tranquility of our meetings, but I only had to close my eyes for a moment or turn away my head, and the image would instantly disappear. I persuaded Juliette to tell me her life. Until now she had always refused.

"No! no!" she would say.

And she would add with a smile, looking at me with her large, sad eyes:

"What will we gain, my friend?"

I insisted, I begged.

"It is your duty to reveal it to me and my duty to know it."

At last, conquered by this argument which I never tired of using in various and appealing forms, she consented. Oh, with what sadness!

Her home was in Liverdun. Her father was a physician and her mother, who led a frivolous life, had left her husband. As for Juliette, she had been placed in the home of the Sisters. Her father came home drunk every evening, and there were terrible scenes, for he was very ill-natured. The scandal grew to such proportions that the Sisters sent Juliette away, not wishing to keep the daughter of a wicked woman and a drunkard in their house. Ah, what a miserable life it was! Always locked up in her room and sometimes beaten by her father for no cause whatever! One night, very late, the father entered Juliette's room. "How shall I express it to you!" Juliette said blushing. "Oh, well, you understand. . . ." She jumped out of bed, shouted, opened the window. But the father was frightened and went away. The next morning Juliette left for Nancy, planning to live by working. It was here she had met Charles.

While she was talking in a gentle, even voice I took her hand, her beautiful hand which I pressed with feeling, at the sad points of the story. I was indignant over the action of her father. And I cursed the mother for abandoning her child. I felt the stirrings of a self-sacrificing devotion, and a vindictive desire to avenge her wrongs. When she had finished I wept with burning tears. . . . It was an exquisite hour.

Juliette received very few people; some of Malterre's friends, and two or three of Malterre's feminine friends. One of them, Gabrielle Bernier, a tall, pretty

blond woman, always entered the house in the same fashion.

"Good morning, Monsieur, good morning, dearie. Don't trouble yourself, I'll be gone in a minute."

And she would sit down on the brace of the arm-chair, smoothing her muff with a brusque motion of her hand.

"Just think of it, I have just had another scene with Robert. If you only knew what sort of a man he is! He comes to my house and says whimpering: 'My dear little Gabrielle, I must leave you, my mother told me so this morning, she won't give me any more money.' 'Your mother! I wish I had a chance to answer her. Well, you can tell your mother in my name, that whenever she is ready to give up her lovers, I'll quit you that very day. But in the meantime, she'll have to dig into her pockets alright.' And I don't believe it's true either — a dirty trick like that! I think it's Robert who has cooked it up! We are going to the Ambigu tonight. Are you going?"

"Thank you."

"Well, I must be off! Don't trouble yourself. Good day, Monsieur; good day, dearie."

Gabrielle Bernier irritated me very much.

"Why do you receive such women?" I would say to Juliette.

"What harm is there, my friend? She amuses me."

Malterre's friends, on the other hand, spoke of races and high life; they always had club and women stories to tell and never tired of discussing theatrical matters. It seemed to me that Juliette took an exaggerated pleasure in these conversations, but I excused her, ascribing it to excessive politeness. Jesselin, a very rich young man, considered a serious fellow, was the leader of the circle and all bowed before his evident superiority. "What will Jesselin say? We must ask

Jesselin. Jesselin did not advise that." He was very much sought after. He had traveled widely and knew better than anyone else the best hotels. Having been in Afghanistan, he remembered one particular thing of the entire trip through Central Asia, namely that the Emir of Caboul, with whom he had had the honor of playing chess one day, played as fast as the French. "Why that Emir certainly amazed me." Quite often he would also offer this information: "You know how much I enjoy travel. Well, I can say this much. In sleeping cars, in cabins, in a Russian telega, no matter how or where I was, at half past seven every evening I was in my dress suit!"

Malterre did not like me, friendly though he was. Having a quiet, timid nature, he dared not show his aversion for me, for fear of displeasing Juliette, but I could see it flaring up in his smiling look which was like that of a good-natured but frightened dog, and in his handshake I felt it clamoring for an outlet.

I was happy only when alone with Juliette. There, in the red parlor, under the ægis of the terra cotta statuette of Cupid, we sometimes sat for hours, without uttering a word. I would look at her, she would droop her head, pensively playing with the trimming of her dress or the lacework of her waist. Often my eyes for some reason unknown, filled with tears, which rolled down my cheeks like some perfume, flooding my soul with its magic liquid. And my whole being felt a sensation of satiety and delicious torpor.

"Ah! Juliette! Juliette!"

"Come, come my friend, be sensible."

Those were the only words of love that escaped us.

Some time after this, Juliette gave a dinner to celebrate Charles' birthday. During the whole evening she appeared nervous and irritated. To Charles who offered a timid remark, she replied harshly and curtly,

in a manner which seemed foreign to her. It was two o'clock in the morning before the crowd left. I alone remained in the parlor. Near the door, Malterre stood with his back to me, talking to Jesselin who was putting on his overcoat in the vestibule. And I saw Juliette, her elbows resting on the piano, looking fixedly at me. A gleam of fierce passion flashed in her eyes, suddenly turned dark, almost terrible, marking them as with a novel flame. The wrinkle on her forehead deepened, her nostrils quivered; a strange expression of something unchaste wandered on her lips. I leaped toward her. My knees sought her own, my body cleaved to hers, my mouth pressed against her own, I clasped her in a furious embrace.

She abandoned herself to me entirely and in a very low, choking voice:

"Come tomorrow!" she said.

CHAPTER V

I WISH I did not have to continue this story. I wish I could stop here. . . . Ah, how I wish I could do that! At the thought that I am about to disclose so much ignominy, my courage fails me, I blush for shame, a feeling of cowardice instantly seizes me and agitates the pen in my hand. . . . And I sue for mercy from myself. . . . Alas! I must clamber to the top of this ascending, sorrowful Golgotha, even though my flesh be torn to bleeding pieces, even though my living body be broken against the rocks and stones! Sins like mine, which I am not trying to justify by hereditary defects or by the pernicious effects of an education so contrary to my nature, call for terrible atonement, and the atonement which I have chosen is a public confession of my life.

I say to myself that merciful and noble hearts will think kindly of my self-imposed humiliation and I also say to myself that my example will perhaps serve as a lesson to others. . . . Even if there were only one young man who, on the verge of falling, should happen to read these pages and feel so horrified and so disgusted as to be forever saved from evil, it seems to me that the salvation of his soul would signify the beginning of the redemption of my own. And then again, I hope, although I no longer believe in God, I hope that in the depth of those sanctuaries of peace where in the silence of soul-redeeming nights there rises to heaven the sad and soothing chant of those who pray for the dead, I hope that there, too, I may be granted my share of compassion and of Christian forgiveness.

I had an income of twenty-two thousand francs; furthermore, I was certain that by doing literary work I could earn an equal sum, at least. Nothing seemed difficult to me, the path lay straight before me without a single obstacle, I had but to march on. . . . My shyness, my fears, my doubts, exhaustingly painful efforts, spiritual agonies oh, those things no longer mattered! A novel, two novels a year, a few plays for the theatre. . . . What did that amount to for a young man in love as I was? . . . Weren't people talking about X. . . . and Z. . . . two hopeless and notorious idiots who in a few years amassed a large fortune?. . . Ideas for a novel, a comedy, a dramatic play came to me in droves. . . and I indicated their arrival by a broad and haughty gesture. . . .

I saw myself already monopolizing all the libraries, all the theatres, all the magazines, the attention of the whole world. . . . In the hours when inspiration should prove slow and painful, all I would need to do would be to look at Juliette and masterpieces would come forth from her eyes as in a fairy-tale. I did not hesitate to demand Malterre's departure and complete charge of Juliette's affairs. Malterre wrote heart-rending letters, begged, threatened and finally departed. Later on Jesselin, displaying his usual vaunted tact, told us that Malterre, grief-stricken, had taken a trip to Italy.

"I accompanied him as far as Marseilles," he told us. "He wanted to kill himself and was crying all the time. You know I am not a gullible sort of a chap. . . but he actually made me feel sorry for him. Now really!"

And he added:

"You know. He was ready to fight you. . . . It was his friend, Monsieur Lirat, who kept him from

doing that. . . . I, too, dissuaded him from it because I believe only in a duel to death."

Juliette listened to all these details silently and with apparent indifference. From time to time she drew her tongue across her lips, and in her eyes there was something resembling a reflection of inner joy. Was she thinking of Malterre? Was she happy to learn that someone was suffering on account of her? Alas! I was no longer in a position to ask myself such questions.

A new life began.

I did not like the apartment where Juliette lived; there were in her house neighbors whom I did not like, and above all the apartment concealed memories which I thought it more convenient to forget. For fear that my plans might not be agreeable to Juliette I did not dare to reveal them too abruptly, but at the very first words I said about the matter she grew enthusiastic.

"Yes! yes!" she cried out with joy. "I have been thinking of it myself, dearie. And do you know of what else I have been thinking? Guess, guess quickly, what your little wifie has been thinking of?"

She placed both hands on my shoulders, and smiling:

"Don't you know? . . . Really you don't? . . . Well! she has been thinking of having you come and live with her. . . . Oh! It'll be so nice to have a pretty little apartment where we shall be alone, just the two of us, to love each other, isn't that right, my Jean? . . . You'll work and I'll sit right next to you and do some needle work without making a stir, and from time to time, I'll embrace you to inspire you with great ideas. . . . You shall see, my dear, whether I am a good housekeeper or not, whether I can take care of all your little matters. . . . In the first place, I'll arrange your things in the bureau. Every morning

you will find a fresh flower on it. . . . Then Spy will also have a nice little niche, all new, with red top-knots. . . And then we shall hardly go out at all. . . And we'll sleep as late as we wish. . . . And then. . . and then. . . . Oh, how wonderful it will be!. . ."

Then getting serious again, she said in a grave voice:

"Not to mention the fact that it will be a good deal cheaper. Just about half!"

We rented an apartment on the Rue de Balzac and we busily fixed it up. That was an important task. We were shopping the whole day, examining rugs, choosing hangings, discussing arrangements and estimating things. Juliette would have liked to buy everything she saw, but she professed a preference for elaborate furniture, for loud-colored draperies and heavy embroidery. The glitter of new gold, the dazzling effect of harsh colors attracted, fascinated her. Whenever I ventured to remark something to her, she would say at once:

"How do men come to know about these things? . . Women know better."

She was obdurate in her desire to buy a kind of Arabian chest, frightfully daubed up, set with mother-of-pearl, ivory imitation stones, and of immense size.

"You can see for yourself that it's too large, that it won't get into our house at all," I said to her.

"Do you really think so? Well how about sawing off the legs, dearie?"

And more than twenty times during the day she stopped in the middle of her conversation to ask me:

"Well, do you really think it is too large? . . . That beautiful chest I mean."

In the carriage, as soon as she got in, Juliette nestled close to me, offered me her lips, smothered me with caresses, happy, radiant.

"Oh! you naughty boy, who never said a word to

me, and who stood just looking at me, with his sad eyes. . . yes, your beautiful sad eyes that I love. . . you naughty! . . . I had to start it all myself! . . . hadn't I? . . . otherwise you would have never dared, would you? . . . Were you afraid of me, tell me? Do you remember when you took me in your arms, that evening? I did not know where I was, I could no longer see anything. . . . My throat, my chest felt as though I had swallowed something very hot. . . . isn't that funny. . . . I thought I was going to die. . . burned by you. . . . It was so sweet, so sweet! . . . Why, I have loved you since the first day we met. . . . No, I was in love with you before. . . . Ah, you are laughing! . . . You don't believe then that you can love someone without knowing or seeing him? . . . Well I do! . . . I am sure of it! . . ."

My heart was beating so fast, these words were so new to me, that I could not find anything to say in reply; I was choking with happiness. All I could do was to clasp Juliette in my arms, mutter some inarticulate words and weep with joy. Suddenly she became thoughtful, the furrow on her forehead deepened, she withdrew her hand from mine. I was afraid I had offended her:

"What's the matter, my Juliette?" I asked her. "Why do you look so? . . . Have I hurt you?"

And Juliette, disconsolate, said with a sigh:

"The corner-buffet, my dear! . . . The corner-buffet for the parlor which we have entirely forgotten."

She quickly passed from laughter, from kisses to sudden gravity, mingled words of endearment with ceiling measurements, confused love with tapestry. . . It was delightful.

In our room, in the evening, all this pretty childishness disappeared. Love stamped upon the face of Juliette something austere, deliberate and ferocious

which I could not explain; it changed her entirely. She was not depraved; on the contrary, her passion showed itself to be strong and normal, and in her caresses there was awe-inspiring nobility and courage. Her body trembled as if in terrible labor.

My happiness lasted but a short time. . . . My happiness! . . . It is really remarkable that never, never have I been permitted to enjoy anything fully, and that invariably anxiety came to disturb the brief periods of my happiness. Defenseless and powerless against suffering, not sure of myself and timid in the hours of happiness — such I have been all my life. Is it a tendency peculiar to my nature? A strange perversion of my sensibilities? . . . Or is it rather that happiness in my own case as well as in the case of everybody else is really deceptive, and that it is nothing but a more tormenting and more refined form of universal suffering? . . .

Now this for example. . . . The faint glimmer of the night-lamp flickers feebly upon the curtains and the furniture; Juliette is asleep, early in the morning, the morning after our first night. One of her arms, bare, rests upon the sheet; the other, also bare, is gracefully coiled up under her nape. All around her face — which reflects the pallid light of the bed, a face which looks like that of a murdered person, with eyes encircled by dark rings — her loose black hair is scattered, sinuous and flowing like waves! I contemplate her eagerly. . . . She is sleeping close to me, with a deep calm sleep, like a child. And for the first time possession occasions no regret, no disgust in me; for the first time I am able to look at a woman who has just given herself to me. I cannot express my feelings at this moment. What I feel is something indefinable, something exceedingly sweet and at the same time very grave and holy, a sort of religious

ecstasy similar to the one which I experienced at the time of my first communion. . . I recognize the same mystic transport, the same great and sacred awe; it is like another revelation of God taking place in the transplendent light of my soul. . . . It seems to me that God has come down to me for the second time. . . . She sleeps, in the silence of the room, with her mouth half-open, her nostrils motionless; she sleeps with a sleep so gentle that I cannot even hear her breathing. . . . A flower on the mantlepiece is there, withering, and a whiff of its dying fragrance reaches me. I can't hear Juliette at all, she is only asleep, she is breathing, she is alive and yet I can't hear her. I move nearer to her and gently bend over her, almost touching her with my lips, and in an almost inaudible voice I call her.

"Juliette!"

Juliette does not stir. But I feel her breath, fainter than that of the flower, her breath always so fresh, with which at this moment there is mingled, like a waft of warmth, her fragrant breath which blends with an imperceptible odor of decay.

"Juliette!"

Juliette does not stir. But the sheet which follows the curves of her body, showing the shape of her limbs, loosens itself into a rigid crease, and the sheet looks to me like a shroud; And the thought of death suddenly comes to my mind and lingers there. I begin to be afraid that Juliette is dead.

"Juliette!"

Juliette does not stir. My whole being is now plunged into a frenzy of fear, and while in my ears the distant knell resounds, around the bed I see the light of a thousand funeral tapers trembling under the vibrations of a de profundis prayer. My hair stands on end, my teeth chatter and I shout, I shout:

"Juliette! Juliette!"

At last Juliette moves her head, heaves a sigh and murmurs, as if in a dream:

"Jean!. . . My Jean!"

Forcefully I grasp her into my arms as if to defend her against some one; I draw her toward me and trembling, with my blood running cold, I beg her:

"Juliette!. . . My own Juliette. . . don't sleep. . . Oh, please don't sleep! . . . You frighten me! . . Let me see your eyes; talk to me, talk to me! . . . And pinch me, pinch yourself, too, pinch me hard. . . . But don't sleep any more, please. . . ."

She cuddles into my arms, whispers some unintelligible words and falls asleep again, her head hanging on my shoulder. . . . But the apparition of death, stronger than the awakening of love, persists, and although I feel the regular beating of Juliette's heart against my own, it does not vanish until day.

How often since that time, when with her, I have felt the frigid touch of death in her fiery kisses! . . . And how often in the midst of rapture there appeared to me the sudden and capering image of the singer at the Bouffes!. . . How many times did his lustful laugh drown the ardent words of Juliette!. . . How often I have heard him say to me, while his image kept leaping above me: "Go ahead, glut yourself upon this imbecile body, upon this unclean body which I defiled!. . . Go on!. . . Go on!. . . wherever you touch your lips you will breathe the impure odor of my own; wherever your caresses may wander upon this body of a prostitute they will encounter the filthy marks of my own manhandling. . . . Go ahead, wash her, your Juliette, wash her in the lustral water of your love, cleanse her with the acid of your mouth. . . Strip off her skin with your teeth, if you will; you will

efface nothing, never, because the mark of infamy with which I have branded her is ineffaceable."

And I often had a passionate desire to question Juliette about this singer whose vision haunted me so much. But I had not the courage. I contented myself with trying to get at the truth in an ingenious, roundabout way: often, in the midst of conversation I would mention a name unexpectedly, hoping, yes hoping that Juliette would be a little put out by it, that she would blush, would feel embarrassed and would say: "Yes, that's the one." I thus exhausted the list of names of all the singers in all the theatres, without gaining the least evidence of perturbation in Juliette's impenetrable attitude.

It took us almost three months to install ourselves completely. The upholsterers could never get through with their work and Juliette's caprices often called for changes that took a long time to accomplish. Every day she would come back from her shopping with new ideas about the decoration of the parlor, or the dressing room. The hangings in the bedroom had to be entirely changed three times because she did not like them.

Finally one nice morning we took possession of our apartment on the Rue de Balzac. . . . It was high time we did. . . . All this unsettled existence, this continuous hurry, these open trunks yawning like coffins, this brutal scattering of dear and intimate things, these heaps of linen, these pyramids of boxes turned upside down, these cut-up pieces of string which dragged all over, all this disorder, this chaos, this trampling underfoot of things with which are associated the dearest memories or most tender regrets, and above all this feeling of uncertainty, of terror, and the sad reflections which the act of leaving a

place occasions — all this made me uneasy, dejected and, must I say it, remorseful.

While Juliette was moving about, bustling amidst bundles, I was asking myself whether I had not committed some irreparable folly. Of course, I loved her. . . . Ah! I loved her with all the power of my soul. So far, nothing except this passion which obsessed me more and more every day, interested me at all. Still, I regretted that I had yielded so easily and quickly to an infatuation that was perhaps fraught with the gravest consequences for her and myself. I was dissatisfied with myself for not having been able to resist Juliette's wish, expressed in such delicious fashion, that I live together with her. . . . Could we not love each other just as well if each of us lived separately and avoid the possible clashes over such sordid things as wall-paper, for example.

And while the splendor of all this plush and the insolence of all these gilt objects in the midst of which we were now going to live frightened me, I felt a sorrowful attachment for my own scanty furniture placed without order, for my little apartment, austere yet tranquil, and now empty — an attachment one has for beloved things that are dead. But Juliette would pass by, busy, agile and charming, would embrace and kiss me on her way, and there was such a life-giving joy in her whole being, a joy so easily mingled with astonishment and childish despair at anything lost, that my morose thoughts vanished as do the night owls at sunrise.

Ah! the happy days that followed our moving from the Rue Saint Petersbourg! . . . First we had to test every piece of furniture down to the smallest details. Juliette sat on every divan, lounge and sofa, causing the springs to creak.

"You try it also, my dear," she would say to me.

She examined every piece of furniture, scrutinized the hangings, tried the strings of the door curtain, moved a chair to a different place, smoothed a crease in the draperies. And every instant cries of admiration, of ecstasy were heard!

Then she wanted to start the inspection of the apartment all over again with the windows closed and the lights burning, in order to see the effect produced at night, never tiring of examining a thing more than once, running from one room to another, marking down every defect on a piece of paper. Then it was the wardrobe where she put her linen and mine with meticulous care and elaborate nicety and the consummate skill of a stall keeper. I chided her for assigning to me the better scentbags.

"No! no! no! I want to have a little husband who uses perfume!"

Of her old furniture and old knick-knacks, Juliette had kept only the terra-cotta statue of Love which again took its place of honor on the mantlepiece in the parlor. I, on the other hand, had brought over only my books and two very beautiful sketches by Lirat which I thought it a duty to hang up in my study. Scandalized, Juliette cried with indignation:

"What are you doing there, my dear? . . . Such horrible things in our new apartment! . . . Please put these horrible things away somewhere! Oh, put them away!"

"My dear Juliette," I answered somewhat provoked. "You have kept your terra-cotta statue of Love, not so?"

"Certainly I have. . . . But what has that to do with this? . . . My terra-cotta statue is very, very lovely. Whereas that thing there. . . why really! . . . And then it's improper! . . . Besides, every time

I look at the paintings of that fool Lirat I feel a pain in my stomach."

Before that I used to have the courage of my artistic convictions and I defended them with fire. But now it seemed puerile on my part to engage in a discussion of art with Juliette, so I contented myself with hiding the pictures inside a press without much regret.

Finally the day arrived when everything was in admirable order; everything in its place, the smallest objects resting smartly on the tables, console tables, windows; the stands decorated with large leafed plants; the books in the library within reach; Spy in his new niche and flowers everywhere. . . . Nothing was missing, nothing, not even a rose, whose stem bathed in a long thin glass vase standing on my desk. Juliette was radiant, triumphant; she repeated without end:

"Look, look again how well your little wife has worked!"

And resting her head on my shoulder with a tender look in her eyes and a genuinely agitated voice, she murmured:

"Oh, my adored Jean, at last we are in our own home, our own home, just think of it!. . . How happy we shall be here, in our pretty nest!. . ."

The next morning Juliette said to me:

"It has been a long time since you saw Monsieur Lirat. I don't want him to think that I keep you from visiting him."

It was true, nevertheless. It really seemed as if for the last five months, I had forgotten all about poor Lirat. But had I really forgotten him? Alas no! . . . Shame kept me from going to him. . . . Shame alone estranged me from him. . . . I assure you that I would have never hesitated to announce to the whole

world: "I am Juliette's lover!"; but I had not the courage to utter these words in Lirat's presence.

At first I had a notion to confess all to him, no matter what happened to our friendship. . . . I would say to myself: "all right, tomorrow I am going to see Lirat". . . I would make up my mind firmly. . . . And the next day: "Not now. . . there is nothing pressing. . . . tomorrow!. . ." Tomorrow, always tomorrow!. . . And days, weeks, months passed. . . . Tomorrow!

Now that he had been told all about these things by Malterre, who even before my departure used to come and make his sofa groan, how could I broach the subject to him? . . . What could I say to him? . . How endure his look, his contempt, his anger. . . . His anger, perhaps!. . . But his contempt, his terrible silence, the disconcerting sneer which I already saw taking shape at the corner of his mouth. . . . No, no, really I did not dare!. . . To try to mollify him, to take his hand, to ask his forgiveness for my lack of confidence in him, to appeal to the generosity of his heart!. . . No! It would ill become me to assume such a part, and then Lirat with just one word could throw a damper on me and stop my effusion. . . . What's the use! . . . Each day that passed separated us further, estranged us from each other more and more. . . a few more months and there would no longer be any Lirat to reckon with in my life! . . . I should prefer that rather than cross his threshold and face him in person. . . . I replied to Juliette:

"Lirat?. . . Oh yes. . . . I think I'll do that some of these days!"

"No, no!" insisted Juliette. . . . "Today! You know him, you know how mean he is. God knows how many ugly things he must have said about us!"

I had to make up my mind to see him. From the

Rue de Balzac to Rodrigue Place is but a short distance. To postpone as long as possible the moment of this painful interview I made a long detour on my way, walking as far as the shop district of the Saint Honoré suburb. And I was thinking to myself: "Suppose I don't go to see Lirat at all. I can tell her, when I come back, that we have quarrelled, and I can invent some sort of a story that will forever relieve me of the necessity of this visit." I felt ashamed of this boyish thought. . . . Then I hoped that Lirat was not at home! With what joy could I then roll up my card into a tube and slip it through the keyhole! Comforted by this thought I at last turned in the direction of Rodrigue Place and stopped in front of the door of the studio — and this door seemed to fill me with fear. Still I rapped at it and presently a voice, Lirat's voice, called:

"Come in!"

My heart beat furiously, a bar of fire stopped my throat — I wanted to flee. . . .

"Come in!" the voice repeated.

I turned the door knob.

"Ah! Is that you, Mintié," Lirat exclaimed. "Come on in."

Lirat was seated at his table, writing a letter.

"May I finish this?" he said to me. "Just two more minutes and I'll be through."

He resumed writing. It was a relief not to feel upon myself the chill of his look. I took advantage of the fact that his back was turned to unburden my soul to him.

"I have not seen you for such a long time, my good Lirat."

"Why, yes, my dear Mintié!"

"I have moved."

"Ah, is that so!"

"I live on the Rue de Balzac."

"Nice place!"

I was suffocating. . . . I made a supreme effort to gather all my strength. . . but by a strange aberration I thought I would succeed better by adopting a flippant method of approach. Upon my word of honor! I railed, yes, railed at myself.

"I have come to tell you some news which will amuse you. . . . Ha!. . . . Ha!. . . which will amuse you. . . I am sure. . . I. . . I. . . live with Juliette. . . . Ha! . . . Ha! . . . with Juliette Roux. . . Juliette, you know. . . . Ha! Ha!"

"Congratulations!" He uttered this word "congratulations" in a perfectly calm, indifferent voice. . . Was it possible! No hiss, no anger, no jumping at me!. . . Just "Congratulations!. . . ." As one might say: "how do you expect that to interest me?" And his back bent over the table remained motionless without straightening up, without stirring!. . . His pen did not slip from his hand; he continued to write! What I told him just now he had known long ago. . . But to hear it out of my own mouth!. . . I was stupefied — and shall I confess it? — I was wounded by the fact that the matter did not seem to affect him at all!. . . Lirat rose and rubbing his hands:

"Well! what's new?" he asked.

I could not stand it any longer. I rushed toward him with tears in my eyes.

"Listen to me," I shouted sobbing. "Lirat, for God's sake, listen to me. . . . I did not act fairly toward you. . . . I know it. . . . and I ask your forgiveness. . . . I should have told you all. . . . But I did not have the courage to. . . . You frighten me. . . And then. . . you remember Juliette, the one you told me about, right here. . . you remember. . . she is the

one who kept me from doing that. . . . Do you understand?"

"My dear Mintié," interrupted Lirat, "I did not want you to tell me anything. I am neither your father nor your confessor. Do what you please, that does not concern me in the least."

I became excited.

"You are not my father, that is true. . . but you are my friend. . . and I owe you all the confidence in the world. . . . Forgive me!. . . Yes, I live with Juliette, and I love her and she loves me! . . . Is it a crime to seek a little happiness?. . . Juliette is not the kind of a woman you thought she was. . . she has been calumniated most odiously, Lirat. . . . She is kind and honest. . . . Oh, don't smile. . . she is honest!. . . She has some childish ways about her that would touch even you, Lirat. You don't like her because you don't know her. . . . If you only knew how kind and considerate she is to me! Juliette wants me to work. . . . She ardently believes in me, in my ability to create. . . . Why it was she who sent me here to see you. I was ashamed and afraid. . . . Yes she made me do that! Have a little consideration for her, Lirat. Love her a little, I beg of you!"

Lirat became grave. He put his hand on my shoulder and, looking at me wistfully:

"My dear child!" he said to me in a trembling voice, "why do you tell me all that?"

"Because it is the truth, my dear Lirat!. . because I love you and I want to remain your friend. . . Show me that you are my friend no matter what happens... Here now, come to have dinner with us this evening, as we used to in the past, in my own house. Oh, please come!"

"No," he said.

And this " no " was relentless, final, curt, like a gunshot.

Lirat added:

" But you come often! . . . And whenever you feel like crying. . . the sofa is there. . . you know. . . . The tears of poor devils are quite known to it."

When the door was shut behind me, it seemed that something huge and heavy had closed itself upon my past, that walls higher than the sky and darker than the night had separated me forever from my decent life, from my dreams of art. There was anguish in my whole being. . . . For a minute I stood there, stupefied, with swinging arms, with eyes inordinately distended, staring at that prophetic door behind which something had just come to a close, something had just died.

CHAPTER VI

JULIETTE was not long in wearying of this beautiful apartment where she had promised herself so much peace and happiness. Having arranged her wardrobes and put her knick-knacks in order, she did not know what to do next and was surprised at this discovery. The tapestry no longer excited her admiration, reading afforded her no distraction. She passed from one room to another, without knowing what to do, what to busy her mind with, yawning, stretching herself. She shut herself up in her room where she spent hours in dressing herself, in trying on new clothes in front of the looking glass, in turning the faucet of the bath tub, which occupation amused her for a while, in combing Spy and in making elaborate bows for him from the bands of her old hats.

Managing the house might have filled the void of her idle days, but I soon realized with chagrin that Juliette was not at all the housekeeper she had boasted she was. She was careless, had no taste, was preoccupied only with her linen underwear and her dog; everything else was of no importance to her, and things took their own course or rather went according to the wishes of the servants. Our renewed staff of domestics consisted of a cook, an old, sloppy woman, grasping and ill-tempered, whose cooking talents did not extend beyond tapioca pudding, hashed veal with white sauce and salad; a chamber maid, Celestine, impudent and depraved, who respected only people who spent large sums of money, and a housekeeper, Mother Sochard, who prayed incessantly and often used to get

frightfully drunk in order to forget her troubles, as she said: her husband who beat her and took away her money, and her daughter who was good for nothing.

The waste was enormous, our table very bad and the rest correspondingly so. Whenever we happened to have visitors, Juliette would order from Bignon the rarest and most elaborate dishes. I viewed with displeasure the uncommon intimacy, a sort of bond of friendship, which had sprung up between Juliette and Celestine. When dressing her mistress, the maid told her stories which the former enjoyed immensely; she disclosed improper secrets of the homes where she had served and advised Juliette in all matters. "At Mme. K's they do it this way — at Mme. V's they do it that way." That they were "swell places" goes without saying. Juliette often went into the linen room where Celestine was sewing and stayed there for hours, seated on a heap of bed sheets, listening to the inexhaustible gossip of the servant-girl... From time to time an argument would arise over some stolen thing or some neglected duty. Celestine would get excited, hurling the grossest insults, knocking the furniture, screaming in her squeaky voice:

"Well!.. Many thanks to you!.. This is some dirty place!.. A goose like that has the nerve to accuse one!.. Well look here, my pretty one, I am going to shake myself free from you and your boob over there who has the face of a dunce."

Juliette would tell her to get out immediately, not wishing her even to stay out her week.

"Yes, yes! Pack up at once, you nasty girl... right away!"

She would come to sulk in my presence, pale and trembling:

"Ah! my dear, that vile creature, that wretched woman!... And I who was so kind to her!..."

In the evening they would make up again, and amidst laughter which resounded louder than ever, Celestine's voice would bawl out:

"I should say the Countess was a rude slut!"

One day Juliette said to me:

"Your little wife has nothing to put on. She is as naked as a new born child, the poor thing!"

And so there were new visits to the dressmaker's, to the milliner's, to the linen shop; and she again became gay, vivacious, affectionate. The shadow of boredom which had crossed her countenance disappeared. . . . In the midst of materials, laces, among plumes and gewgaws, her whole being expanded and shone forth. Her tender fingers experienced a physical delight in handling satin, in touching crepe, in stroking velvet, in losing themselves in the milky white waves of fine batiste. The smallest piece of silk, when she draped it into something, at once assumed the pretty appearance of a living thing; out of braid and lace trimmings she could draw the most exquisite harmonies. Although I was very much alarmed by these expensive whims, I could not refuse Juliette anything, and I abandoned myself to the joy of seeing her so happy, to the delight of seeing her so charming — her, whose beauty rendered all inanimate objects about her beautiful, her, who put the breath of gracious life into everything she touched!

For more than a month packages and strange cases were being delivered to us every evening. . . . Dresses followed dresses, hats followed cloaks, umbrellas and embroidered chemises; the most expensive linens accumulated in heaps and filled all the drawers, presses, wardrobes.

"You see, my dear," Juliette explained to me, discerning amazement in my glance. "You see I did not have anything. . . . This is all I need. From now

on, all I'll have to do is to receive people. . . . Ah don't be afraid! . . . I am very economical. See here, I have had a high body made in all my gowns for every day use on the street, and a decolleté to wear at the Opera! Just figure out how many dresses that will save me. . . . One. . . two. . . three. . . four. . . five. . . dresses, my dear! . . . You see now!"

For the first appearance at the theatre she put on a gown that was the sensation of the evening. As long as the tormenting affair lasted I was the most miserable man in the world. . . . I felt the covetous glances of the entire audience directed on Juliette, glances that devoured her, that disrobed her, glances that defile the woman one adores. I would have liked to hide Juliette deep in the loge and throw a thick dark woolen cloak on her shoulders, and with heart clawed by hatred I wished the theatre had sunk into the ground through some sudden cataclysm, that by a sudden collapse of its ceiling and chandeliers it had crushed to a powder all these men, each of whom was stealing a little of Juliette's chastity, a little of her love from me. She, on the other hand, triumphant, seemed to say: "I love you all, gentlemen, for thinking me beautiful. You are nice people."

Scarcely did we enter our house when I drew Juliette toward me and for a long, long time held her pressed to my heart, repeating without end: "You love me, Juliette, don't you?" but the heart of Juliette was no longer listening to me. Seeing that I was sad, noticing that from my eyelids tears were about to fall upon her cheek, she freed herself from my embrace and said somewhat angrily:

"What! I was the prettiest, the most beautiful of them all! . . . And you are not satisfied yet? . . . And you are crying yet! . . . That is not nice at all! . . . What more do you want?"

Our first disagreeable quarrel arose over Juliette's friends. Gabrielle Bernier, Jesselin and some other people, formerly brought over to our house at the Rue de Saint Petersbourg by Malterre, again began to pursue us at the Rue de Balzac. I frankly told her so; she seemed very much surprised.

"What have you against Monsieur Jesselin?" she asked me. She used to call the others by their Christian names. . . but she pronounced the name Monsieur Jesselin with great respect.

"I certainly have nothing against him, my dear. . . But I don't like him, he gets on my nerves. . . he is ridiculous. Here, then, I think are good reasons for not wishing to see that idiot."

Juliette was shocked. That I should have called a man of Monsieur Jesselin's importance and reputation an idiot was quite incomprehensible to her. She looked at me with fear as if I had just uttered a terrible blasphemy.

"Monsieur Jesselin, an idiot! . . . He. . . . such a gentleman, so serious minded, and who has been to India! . . . Don't you know that he is a member of the Geographical Society?"

"What about Gabrielle Bernier? . . Is she also a member of the Geographical Society?"

As a rule Juliette never lost her temper. When she was angry her look became severe, the wrinkle on her forehead deepened, her voice lost a little of its sweet sonorousness. She answered simply:

"Gabrielle is my friend."

"That's just what I object to."

There was a moment of silence. Juliette, seated in an armchair, was fingering the lace of her morning gown, thinking. An ironic smile wandered on her lips.

"Do you mean to say that I must not see anyone?

. . . Is that what you want? . . . Well that's going to be very amusing. . . . We shall never go out any more. . . we shall live like beasts! . . ."

"That's not the question at all, my dear. . . . I have some friends. . . I'll ask them to come. . . ."

"Oh yes, I know your friends. . . . I can see them right before me, writers, painters. . . people whom one doesn't understand when they talk. . . and who borrow money from us. . . Thank you very much! . ."

I felt offended and quickly replied:

"My friends are honest people, do you hear, with talent, whereas that idiot and that nasty woman! . . ."

"I think we have had enough of this," Juliette imperiously said. "Is that your wish? . . . All right. I shall close my door to them. Only when you insisted on my living with you, you should have told me that you wanted to bury me alive. I would have known what to do then. . . ."

She rose. I was not even thinking of telling her that, on the contrary, it was she who had wished that we keep house together. Realizing that it was useless to argue any further I took her hand:

"Juliette," I entreated her.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Are you angry?"

"I, on the contrary, I am very much contented. . . ."

"Juliette!"

"Come, let go of me . . . quit . . . you hurt me."

Juliette was sulky all day; when I said something to her she did not answer or contented herself with articulating monosyllables curtly and with irritation. I was unhappy and angry at the same time; I would have liked to embrace her and to beat her, to shower kisses and kicks on her. At dinner she still kept the air of an offended woman, with her lips firmly closed and a disdainful look in her eyes. In vain did I try

to appease her by humble conduct and sad repentant looks; her assumed sullenness remained unchanged, on her brow there was still that dark furrow which made me uneasy. At night, in bed, she took a book and turned her back to me. And the back of her perfumed neck to which my lips loved to cling with rapturous joy, now seemed to me harder than a stone wall. . . . Within me deep resentment was stirring, but I forced myself not to betray it. In the measure that I was filled with rage, my voice sought sweeter accents, it grew gentler and more beseeching.

"Juliette! my Juliette! . . . Speak to me, please! . . . Speak to me! Did I offend you, was I too harsh with you? I know I was. . . . Well, I am sorry and I ask your forgiveness. . . . But only speak to me."

My impression was that Juliette was not listening to me at all. She was cutting the pages of the book, and the noise of the friction of the knife against the paper annoyed me terribly.

"My Juliette. . . . Please understand me. . . . It is because I love you that I said that. . . . It is because I wish to see you pure, respected, and because it seems to me that all those are unworthy of you. . . . If I did not love you, would that make any difference to me? . . . And you think that I don't want you to go out! . . . Why no. . . . We shall go out often, every evening. . . . Ah, please don't be like that! . . . I was wrong! . . . Scold me, strike me. . . . But only speak to me, please speak to me!"

She continued turning the pages of the book. The words were throttled in my throat.

"It is not fair to act the way you do, Juliette. It is not nice at all to be like that. . . . Since I admitted my guilt! Ah, what pleasure do you get out of torturing me like this? . . . Didn't I say I was sorry? Come on, Juliette, I admit I was wrong!"

Not a muscle in her body moved in response to my supplication. Her nape exasperated me more than ever. Amidst locks of silky hair I now saw eyes which railed at me and a mouth which mocked me. And I had an impulse to strike her, to belabor her with my fists, to beat her till she bled.

"Juliette!" I shouted.

And my fingers, shriveled, spread apart and hooked like talons of a bird of prey, came close to her, in spite of myself, ready to claw this nape, impatient to tear it to pieces.

"Juliette!"

Juliette slowly turned her head, looked at me with contempt, without fear.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"What do I want? . . . What do I want?"

I was going to threaten her. . . . I half arose in bed, I was gesticulating violently. . . . And suddenly my rage subsided, I came close to Juliette, crouched before her, filled with repentance, and kissing that perfumed and beautiful nape:

"What I want, my dear, is that you should be happy. . . . That you shall receive your friends. . . . It was so foolish on my part to demand of you what I did! . . . Aren't you the best of women? . . . Don't I love you? . . . Ah, hereafter I shall have no other wish than yours, I promise you! . . . And you'll see how nice I am going to be to them! . . . Wait. . . . Why should you not invite Gabrielle for dinner? . . . And Jesselin also?"

"No! No! You say it now, but tomorrow you'll reproach me for it. . . . No! No! . . . I don't want to force upon you people whom you despise — nasty women and idiots!"

"I don't know where my head was when I said that. . . . I don't despise them at all . . . on the

contrary I like them very much. . . . Invite both of them. . . . And I'll go and get a box at the Vaudeville."

"No!"

"I implore you!"

Her voice became less harsh, she closed the book.

"Well! We'll see tomorrow."

Really, at that moment I loved Gabrielle, Jesselin, Celestine — I even thought I loved Malterre.

I no longer worked. Not that love of work deserted me, but I no longer had the creative faculty in me. I used to sit down at my desk every day, with blank sheets of paper before me, searching for ideas, and failing to find them, I would again relapse into anxieties of the present, which meant Juliette, into dread of the future, which again meant Juliette! . . . Just as a drunkard clutches and turns his empty bottle to get the last drop of liquor out of it, so I searched my brains in the hope of squeezing the least bit of an idea out of it. . . . Alas! My head was empty!

It was empty and weighed upon my shoulders like an enormous ball of lead! . . . My mentality was always slow in getting started: it required stimulation, it had to be lashed with a whip. Because of my ill-balanced sensibility, my passive nature, I easily yielded to intellectual or moral influences, whether good or bad. And again, Lirat's friendship was quite useful to me in the past. My own ideas melted in the warmth of his spirit; his conversation opened for me new horizons hitherto unsuspected; whatever confused ideas I had were cleared up, they assumed a more definite form which I endeavored to express; he taught me how to see, to understand things and made me delve with him into the mysteries of life.

Now, the clear horizons toward which I was led shrunk and were shut off before me daily, almost

hourly, and night was coming, black night, which to me was not only visible but tangible, for I could actually touch this monstrous night, I felt its darkness stuck fast in my hair, glued to my fingers, coiled around my body in clammy rings. . . .

My study room opened into a yard, or rather a little garden shaded by two large plane-trees and bounded by a wall that had lattice work and was covered with ivy. Behind this wall, in the midst of another garden, the grey and very high façade of a house rose, accosting me with five rows of windows. On the third floor an old man sat near the window opening which encased him like a picture frame. He wore a cap of black velvet, a checkered morning robe, and he never stirred. Shrunk into himself, his head drooping on his chest, he seemed asleep. Of his face I could see only wrinkles of yellowish, wrinkled flesh, dark cavities and locks which looked like tufts of a soiled beard, resembling some strange vegetation sprouting on the trunks of dead trees. Sometimes the profile of a woman would bend over him sinisterly, and this profile had the appearance of an owl perched upon the aged man's shoulder; I could discern its hooked bill and round eyes, cruel, avaricious and bloodthirsty. When the sun shone into the garden, the window opened and I heard a shrill, piercing, angry voice which never ceased screaming reproaches. Then the old man would shrink into himself still farther, his head would begin to oscillate slightly, then he would become motionless again, still more buried in the folds of his morning robe, still deeper sunk in his armchair.

I used to sit for hours and watch the unhappy man, and I fancied terrible tragedies, some fatal love affair, a noble life bungled, crushed and ruined by that woman with the owl face. I pictured to myself this living corpse as beautiful, young and strong. . . . Perhaps

he had been an artist once upon a time, a scientist, or simply a happy and kind-hearted man. And tall and upright, with a gaze full of hope, he marched towards glory or happiness. . . . One day he met that woman at the house of a friend . . . and that woman, too, wore a perfumed veil, a small muff, an otter skin cap, a heavenly smile, and an air of angelic sweetness. . . . And forthwith he fell in love with her. . . . I followed step by step the development of his love affair, I counted up his weaknesses, his moments of cowardice, his growing downfalls up to the time of his sinking into this armchair for cripples and paralytics.

And what I imagined his life was to him, my own life was to me, those were my own feelings, it was my own dread of the future, my own anguish. . . . Little by little my hallucination took on a singular physical form, and it was myself that I saw in this velvet cap, in this morning robe with this battered body, this murky beard, and Juliette who stood over my shoulder like an owl. . . .

Juliette! . . . She walked about in the study, weary of body, her whole figure betraying boredom, yawning and sighing. She could not think of anything to distract her. Most often she would place the card table not far from me and lose herself in the card combinations of a complicated "patience," or she would stretch herself out on the sofa, spread a napkin over her dress, place upon it some tiny instruments of tortoise shell, microscopic containers of ointment, and begin polishing her nails, fiercely filing them and making them shine more lustrously than agate. She would examine them every five minutes, looking for the reflection of her image in the polished surfaces:

"Look my dear! Aren't they beautiful! And you, too, Spy, look at your mistress' pretty nails."

The light friction of the nail brush, the impercepti-

ble creaking of the sofa, Juliette's remarks, her conversation with Spy — all this was sufficient to put to rout the few ideas which I strove to bring together. My thoughts would turn immediately to ordinary matters, and I meditated upon painful things and lived sorrowful things over again. . . . Juliette. . . . Did I love her? Many times this question arose in my mind, pregnant with horrible doubt. . . . Had I not been deceived by the stupefaction of my senses? . . . Was not this thing which I took for love, the ephemeral and fleeting manifestation of a pleasure as yet untasted? . . . Juliette! . . . Of course I loved her. . .

But this Juliette whom I loved, was she not altogether different, was she not the Juliette that I had myself created, that had been born of my own imagination, that had originated in my own brains, whom I had endowed with a soul, with a spark of divinity, whom I had fashioned into being with the ideal essence of angels? . . . And did I not still love her as one does a beautiful book, a beautiful verse, a beautiful statue, a visible and tangible realization of an artist's dream! . . . But this other Juliette! . . . This one here? . . . This pretty, senseless, ignorant animal, this knick-knack, this piece of cloth, this nothing? . . .

I studied her carefully while she was polishing her nails. . . . Oh, how I would have liked to break this neck and sound its emptiness, to open this heart and probe its nothingness! And I said to myself: "What sort of a life will mine be with this woman whose tastes are only for pleasure, who is happy only when she is dressed up, whose every wish costs a fortune, who in spite of her chaste appearance, has an instinctive predilection for vice; who used to leave unhappy Malterre every evening, without a single regret, without a single thought; who will leave me tomorrow,

perhaps; this woman who is a living denial of my aspirations, of my ideals; who will never, never enter into my intellectual life; and lastly this woman who already weighs upon my intelligence like folly, upon my whole being like a crime."

I had a notion to flee, to tell Juliette: "I am going out, I'll be back in an hour," and never to return to this house where the very ceiling was more oppressive to me than the lid of a coffin, where the air stifled me, where the very furniture seemed to say to me: "Leave this place" . . . But no! . . . I loved her, and it was this very Juliette that I loved, not the other one who has gone the way of all dreams! . . . I loved her with all her qualities which made me suffer, I loved her in spite of all her lack of understanding, I loved her with all her frivolity, with all her suspected perversions; I loved her with that tormenting love which a mother has for her afflicted child.

Have you ever met a poor creature huddled up behind the door on some wintry day, a wretched human being with chapped lips and chattering teeth, shivering in his tattered rags? . . . And when you met him, were you not carried away by a feeling of keen pity, and did you not have a desire to take him and warm him against your breast, give him something to eat, cover his shivering body with warm clothes? . . . That is how I loved Juliette; I loved her with an immense pity . . . ah, don't laugh, with a mother's pity, with an endless pity! . . .

"Aren't we going out, my dear? It would be so nice to take a stroll through the Bois."

And casting her eyes on the blank sheet of paper on which I had not written a line:

"Is that all you wrote? . . . Well! . . . You do not seem to have worked very hard. . . . And here I have been sitting around all this time to inspire you

to work! . . . Oh, well, I know you won't get anywhere. . . . You are too lazy!"

Ere long we began going out every day and every evening. I did not resist any longer, almost happy to escape from the deadly aversion and despondent thoughts with which our apartment inspired me, escape from the symbolic vision of the old man, from myself. . . . Ah, above all from myself. In a crowd, in the tumult, in this feverish haste of a pleasure-hunting life I hoped to find forgetfulness, to be able to dull my feeling, to subdue my rebellious spirit, to suppress the voice of my past which I heard grumbling within me. And since I could not raise Juliette to my level I lowered myself down to her own.

Ah, those serene heights where the sun was reigning and toward which I had been climbing slowly with such terrific effort! . . . I must descend into the pit at one dash, in a single, instantaneous, inevitable downfall, even if I crushed my head against the rocks or disappeared in the bottomless mire. With me it was no longer a question of escape. If occasionally the idea did pierce the haze of my mind, if, in the errings of my will-power, I sometimes did perceive a distant way out where duty seemed to call me, I, in order to break away from the idea, in order not to rush hastily toward that end, clung tenaciously to the false pretenses of honor. . . . Could I leave Juliette! I who insisted that she leave Malterre! . . . What will become of her when I am gone? . . . Why no, no! — I was lying to myself. . . . I did not want to leave her because I loved her, because I pitied her, because. . . . But was it not myself that I loved, myself that I pitied? . . . Ah, I no longer knew! I no longer knew!

And then again you should not think that the abyss into which I had fallen was a sudden revelation to

me. . . . Don't you believe it! I saw it from afar, I saw its black opening yawning fearfully, and I ran toward it. I leaned over the edge to inhale the infected odor of its filth, I said to myself: "There is where wasted lives and corrupted beings are dashed and swallowed up. . . . Here one can never come up again, never!" And I plunged into it. . . .

Despite the threatening sky overcast with clouds, the balcony of the café is crowded with people. There is not a vacant table, the cabarets, the circus shows, the theatres have poured forth the scum of their habitués here. Everywhere are bright-colored dresses and black frock coats, ladies adorned with plumes like horses in a parade, weary, sick looking and sallow; flurried fops with heads drooped upon their button holes without flowers, and nibbling the ends of their canes with ape-like gestures. Some of them with legs crossed in order to show their black silk socks embroidered with red flowerets, hats pushed over slightly toward the back, are whistling the latest hit — the air which has just now been sung at the Ambassadeur, to the accompaniment of the creaking of seats, the clatter of glasses and bottles.

The last of the lights in front of the opera has been extinguished. But all around it the windows of the club-houses and brothels are a red blaze, like openings into hell. On the street, parked near the curb, are worn-out and dilapidated open coaches strung out in triple file. Some of the drivers are drowsing in their seats; others gathering into small groups which present a comical appearance in their ill-fitting liveries, are munching cigar stubs, and talking with loud bursts of laughter, telling salacious stories about their clients. One incessantly hears the shrill voice of the newspaper vendors who run back and forth shouting, in the midst of their crisp outcries, the name of some well-

known woman, or some scandalous piece of news, while street arabs, gliding between the tables, cunning as cats, are selling obscene pictures, half revealed, to awaken dormant passions, to stir up curiosities gone to sleep. And little girls whose premature depravity has already blighted their gaunt, childish faces are offering for sale bouquets of flowers, smiling with a dubious smile, charging their glances with the ripe and hideous immodesty of old prostitutes. Inside the cabaret all the tables are taken. . . . There is not a single vacant place. . . . People are drinking champagne without really wanting it and munching sandwiches without in the least caring for them. Occasionally curious people enter the place, before going to their clubs or to bed, by force of habit or from a mere desire to show off or to see if there is "anything doing" there. Slowly and slouching in their walk, they slink about the groups of guests, stopping to chat with their friends here and there and, waving their hands in greeting to some one at a distance, look at themselves in the mirrors, fix their white cravats which stick out from under their light overcoats, then leave, their minds enriched with a few new slang expressions of the underworld, with a few more scandals picked up here and upon which their idleness will thrive for a whole day.

The women with elbows resting on the table, an ice cream soda in front of them, their weak faces, hatched with fine pink lines, supported by long gloved hands, assume a languid air, a suffering mien and a sort of consumptive dreaminess. They exchange mysterious winks and imperceptible smiles with their neighbors at nearby tables, while the gentleman accompanying them, silent and affectedly courteous, strikes the point of his shoes with the tip of his cane. The gathering presents a brilliant spectacle variegated with lace and

baubles, bright trimmings and pompons, tinged plumes and flowers in full bloom, curls of blond hair, tresses of dark hair and the glitter of diamonds. Every one is at his fighting post, the young and the old, beginners with beardless faces, grey-haired veterans, naïve gulls and crafty spongers, here were social scandals, false situations, riotous vice, base covetousness, shameful barter — all the flowers of corruption which sprout — mingle, grow and thrive in the dunghill warmth of Paris.

It was into this atmosphere charged with ennui, restlessness and heavy odors that we used thereafter to come every evening. During the day, visits to the dressmakers, the Bois, the races; in the evening, restaurants, theatres and fashionable gatherings. Wherever this special brand of society people came together, one was certain to see us; we were even made much of because of Juliette's beauty which began to be the subject of people's talk, and her dresses which called forth the envy and emulation of other women. We no longer dined at home. Our apartment served us as hardly anything more than a place to dress. When Juliette was dressing she grew harsh, even cruel. The wrinkle on her forehead cut into her skin like a scar. She uttered disjointed words, grew angry, seemed to be incensed to the point of breaking up things.

All around her the room seemed as if it had been pillaged: trunks were opened, skirts thrown on the carpet, fans taken out of their cases and scattered on the chairs, opera glasses left on the furniture; muslin gowns were lying in heaps in the corners, the floor was strewn with flowers, towels, soiled with rouge, gloves, stockings, veils were hanging on the branches of the candlesticks. And in the midst of this confusion, Celestine, agile, brazen-faced, cynical, was

going through all sorts of evolutions, jumping, sliding, kneeling at the feet of her mistress, sticking a pin here, adjusting the pleats there, knotting threads, her soft, flabby hands, made to handle filthy things, gliding all over Juliette's body with affection. She was happy, she no longer replied to insinuating remarks, to bitter reproaches, and her eyes, persistently ironical, shining with a flame of vulgar depravity were riveted on me.

It was only in public, in the glare of lights, under the cross fire of men's gazes that Juliette again found her smile and expression of joy mixed with a little wonderment and frankness which she reserved only for this repugnant crowd of debauchées. And we used to come to this cabaret accompanied by Gabrielle, by Jesselin, by people met I don't know where, and presented to us by I don't know whom, by idiots and princes, by the whole batch of international and street-corner crooks whom we dragged along with us.

"What are you going to do tonight?"

"I am going with the Mintié crowd."

Jesselin gave us information about the people in the place; he knew all the inside facts of high society life and spoke of it with a sort of admiration in spite of all the shameful or tragic details which he told us.

"That man there, who has a crowd of people around him and who is listened to respectfully, used to be a valet-de-chambre. His master fired him for theft. But he became the keeper of a gambling house, conducted all kinds of illegitimate joints, became cashier of the Club, then skilfully disappeared for a few years. At the present time he is part owner of many gambling houses, has an interest in the race track, has unlimited credit with the stock-brokers, owns horses and a mansion where he receives people. He used to loan money secretly at one hundred percent interest to ladies in financial straits whose gullible natures he would first

test. Ostentatiously generous, buying pictures of the most expensive kind, he passes for an honorable man and patron of the arts. In the papers they speak of him with great respect.

"And that other big, stout fellow whose fleshy, wrinkled face is eternally split by an idiotic laugh? He is but a child! . . . Hardly eighteen years old. He has a mistress known to all, with whom he appears in public every Monday at the Bois, and also has a teacher, an Abbot whom he takes to the lake every Tuesday in the same carriage. His mother has thus conceived of the education of her son, wishing him to lead a life of religious saintliness on the one hand and of gallant adventures on the other. Aside from that he gets drunk every evening, and horse-whips his old fool of a mother. A real type!" Jesselin summed up.

"That duke over there, who bears one of the most illustrious names in France! Ah! that swell duke! the king of spongers! He comes in timidly like a frightened dog, looks through his monocle, takes in the smell of supper, sits down and devours some ham and minced liver pie. Perhaps he has not dined yet, this duke; undoubtedly he has just come back from an unsuccessful daily visit to the café Anglais, or the Maison Doré or Bignon's, in quest of some friend who will treat him to a meal. Being on very good terms with women and horse dealers, he runs errands for the former and rides the horses for the latter. Instructed to say wherever he goes: 'Oh! What a charming woman!'. . . 'Oh! what a wonderful horse!' he receives a few louis for this service with which he pays his valet.

"Here is another great nobleman who is gradually and hopelessly sinking into the mire of illicit business and secret promotion of vice. Once upon a time that fellow was quite the rage of society. Despite his

stoutness which is now evident, despite the puffiness of his flesh, he still has an elegant way of carrying himself, and the air of a gentleman. In the disreputable places and questionable circles which he frequents he plays the remunerative rôle which was played fifty years ago by head waiters at table d'hôtes. His courteousness and education were an asset to him, which he made use of to perfection. He knew how to take advantage of the dishonesty of others as well as of his own, for no one was as skilful in composing matrimonial difficulties of his patrons to the satisfaction of all concerned as he was.

"That livid face there, set in a frame of whiskers turning grey, that miniature mouth, that lustreless eye? No one knows who he really is! For a long time sinister rumors have been current about his person, rumors of bloody affairs. At first people were afraid of him and tried to keep away from him. It's nothing but an old memory after all! For the rest, he spends a lot of money. What does it matter if a few drops of blood do roll on top of piles of gold! Women are crazy about it.

"That young handsome man with mustache gracefully turned up? One day when he did not have a sou to his name, his parents having stopped his allowance, the ingenious notion occurred to him to pretend that he was repentant. He demonstratively quit an old mistress he had and returned to his parents. A young lady, his playmate when he was a child, adored him. She was rich. He married her. But on the very evening of his wedding day he left her, taking the dowry with him, and went back to his old mistress. She is an excellent woman," added Jesselin, "she really is!

"And all those pimps and those who have been chased out of the clubs, expelled from universities, ruined at the stock exchange; and foreigners coming

from the devil knows where, whom one scandal attracts to one place and another scandal draws off to another, and those living outside the pale of the law and bourgeois esteem, who claim to be the royalty of Paris, before whom everybody bows down — they all swarm here, arrogant, free, disreputable!"

Juliette was listening, amused by the stories, attracted by this filth and crime, flattered by this ignoble homage which she felt the glances of these fools and criminals were paying her. But she preserved her modest bearing, her maiden charm, all her graces, self-conscious and inviting at one and the same time, for the sake of which, one day at Lirat's, I earned damnation!

Faces grow more pallid now, features become drawn out. Fatigue swells and colors the eyelids. One after another they leave the cabaret, tired and worried. Do they know what the next day has in store for them, what troubles await them, what disasters lie in ambush for them? Once in a while the report of a pistol shot creates a void in the ranks of this gang! Perhaps tomorrow will be their turn? Tomorrow! Perhaps it will be my turn, too? Ah! Tomorrow! The ever present menace of tomorrow! And we go home again, without saying a word to one another, sad and weary.

The boulevard was deserted. An immense silence was weighing heavily over the city. Only the windows of the brothel houses were aglare, like the eyes of some huge beasts crouching in the depth of night.

Without knowing exactly the state of my financial affairs, I felt that ruin was ahead of me. I had paid out considerable sums of money, debts were accumulating and, far from decreasing, Juliette's whims became even more numerous and more expensive: money flowed like water from her hands, like a fountain, in one continuous stream. "She evidently thinks me richer

than I am," I thought to myself, in an effort to deceive myself. "I ought to warn her, perhaps show myself a little more reserved in yielding to her desires." The truth was that I deliberately dismissed from my mind every notion of this kind, that I dreaded the probable consequences of such a challenge even more than the greatest possible misfortune in the world.

In my rare moments of clear-mindedness, of frankness with myself, I understood that beneath her air of sweetness, beneath her naïveté of a spoiled child, beneath the robust and vibrant passions of her flesh Juliette concealed a powerful desire to be always beautiful, adored, paid court to, concealed a fierce selfishness which would not flinch before any cruelty, before any moral crime! . . . I realized that she loved me less than the last piece of cloth, that she would have sacrificed me for a cloak or a cravat or a pair of gloves. . . . Once drawn into such a life she could not stop. . . . And then what? . . . Cold shivers passed up and down my frame from head to heels. . . . That she should leave me, no, no, that I did not want!

The most painful moment to me was in the morning when I woke up. With eyes closed, pulling the cover over my head, my body huddled up into a ball, I used to ponder over my situation with terrible anguish. And the more faulty she appeared to me, the more desperately I clung to Juliette. No matter how often I said to myself that my money would soon be gone, that the credit on which I could dishonestly prolong the agony of hope against hope for another week or two, would eventually be denied to me; I clung to the present and rabidly evolved all sorts of impossible plans. I pictured myself accomplishing superhuman tasks in the course of one week. I dreamed of finding millions in some hackney coach. Fabulous inheritances

dropped down from the skies for me. The idea of stealing haunted me. . . .

Gradually all these insane notions took hold of my distracted mind. I was presenting Juliette with palaces and castles; I overwhelmed her with diamonds and pearls; gold streamed and glittered all around her, and I raised her high above the earth, upon dizzy, royal heights. Then the sense of reality would suddenly return. I buried myself deeper in the bed. I sought realms of non-existence in whose depth I could disappear. I forced myself to sleep. And suddenly, out of breath, with sweat on my forehead and a haggard look in my eyes, I would snuggle up to Juliette, press her in my arms with all my strength, sobbing:

"You'll never leave me, will you, my Juliette! Tell me, tell me that you'll never leave me. Because, you see. . . . I'll die. . . if you do — I'll go crazy. I'll kill myself! Juliette, I swear to you that I'll kill myself!"

"Why, what has come over you? Why do you tremble so? No, my dear, I'll never leave you. Are we not happy together? Besides, I love you so much! When you are nice as you are now!"

"Yes, yes! I'll kill myself! I'll kill myself!"

"You are so funny, my dear! Why do you tell me that?"

"Because."

I was going to tell her everything. . . . But I had not the courage. And I said:

"Because I love you! Because I don't want you to leave me! Because I don't want to."

Nevertheless I finally had to bring this matter to a head. Juliette had seen in the window of a jewelry store on the Rue de la Paix, a string of pearls of which she spoke without end. One day when we were in that neighborhood:

"Let's go and see that beautiful jewel," she said to me.

With her nose pressed against the window pane and eyes shining, she looked at the string arranged in a triple circular row of pink pearls upon the velvet of the jewel case. I saw a tremor passing up and down her skin.

"Isn't that beautiful? And it isn't expensive at all! I have asked about the price. . . fifty thousand francs. . . . That's an exceptional bargain."

I tried to draw her further on. But coaxingly, hanging on my arm, she held me back. And she sighed:

"Ah, how nice that would look on the neck of your little wifie!"

She added with an air of profound grief:

"Really! All the women have lots of jewels. Only I have none. If you were really nice, really kind to me, you would give them to your poor little Juliette. . . . There now!"

I stammered out:

"Certainly. I want to — very much. . . but later . . . next week!"

Juliette's face grew dark:

"Why next week? Can't you do it now, right now!"

"Well you see. . . now. . . I am short of money. . . . I am a little hard up."

"What? Already? You haven't got a sou? Is that a fact? Where did all your money go? You have not a sou left?"

"Why yes, I have! Only I am a little short of cash temporarily."

"Well if that's the case it doesn't matter. I have also made inquiries about the terms. They would agree to accept promissory notes. Five notes of six thousand francs each. That is not such a mighty matter!"

"Undoubtedly. But a little later! I promise you. Is that all right?"

"Ah!" Juliette said simply.

I looked at her, the wrinkle on her forehead terrified me; I saw a hidden glimmer flare up in her eyes, and in the space of a second a world of extraordinary sensations hitherto unknown to me, took hold of me. Very clearly, with perfect understanding, with cruel indifference, with a startling conciseness of judgment I put the following question to myself: "Juliette and dishonor; Juliette and prison?" I did not hesitate.

"Let's go in," I said.

She took the string of pearls away with her.

In the evening, wearing her pearls, she sat down on my lap, radiant, with her arms closed around my neck. She sat so for a long time, lulling me with her sweet voice.

"Ah, my poor sweetie," she said, "I am not always sensible! Yes, I realize. I am a little foolish sometimes. But I am through now! I want to be a good, a serious-minded woman. And you shall work undisturbed, you'll write a good novel — a nice play. Then we shall be rich, very rich. And then if you should happen to be very much short of money we could sell this beautiful string of pearls! Because jewels are not like dresses, they are just as good as money. Press me in your arms strongly."

Ah! how fast that night was gone! How the hours sped by, no doubt frightened to hear love shrieking with a horrible voice of one who is damned.

Disasters followed one another and soon reached their climax. The promissory notes that I had given Juliette's jeweler remained unpaid. I had a hard time borrowing enough money to satisfy our everyday needs. My father had left some uncollected debts at Saint-Michel. Generous and kind-hearted, he liked

to help out small farmers in a pinch. Pitilessly I started the process servers after these poor devils, causing them to sell their hovels, their piece of land, the things with the aid of which they made a miserable living, depriving themselves of everything. In the shops where I still had credit I bought things which I immediately resold at a very low price. I stooped to putting through the most questionable deals. My brains teemed with original plans of blackmail, and I tired Jesselin with my endless requests of money. Finally one day I went to see Lirat. I needed five hundred francs that evening, and I went to Lirat, deliberately, boldly! In his presence, however, in that studio full of painful memories, my self-assurance deserted me and I felt a sense of belated shame. I was with Lirat a quarter of an hour, without venturing to explain to him the thing that I expected of his friendship. . . . Of his friendship! . . . At last I made up my mind to go.

"Well, good bye, Lirat!"

"Good bye, my friend."

"Ah! I forgot. Could you lend me five hundred francs? I am expecting my farm rents. They are overdue."

And I added rapidly:

"I'll give them back to you tomorrow — tomorrow morning."

Lirat fixed his glance on me for a moment. I can still see that glance. It was truly sorrowful.

"Five hundred francs!" he said. "Where in the devil do you expect me to get them? Have I ever had five hundred francs?"

I insisted, repeating:

"I'll give them back to you tomorrow. . . tomorrow morning."

"But I haven't got them, my poor Mintié. I have

only two hundred francs left. Would that do you any good?"

I was thinking that these two hundred francs which he offered meant to him a whole month's subsistence. I answered with a bleeding heart:

"Well, all right! All the same! I'll give them back to you tomorrow. . . tomorrow morning."

"That is all right!"

At that moment I would have wished to throw myself on Lirat's neck, to beg his pardon, to shout: "No, no I don't want this money!" And like a thief I took it away with me.

CHAPTER VII

MY properties, the Priory itself, the old familiar house mortgaged several times, were sold! . . . Ah! the sad journey which I made on that occasion! . . . It was a long time since I had been to Saint-Michel! And yet in my hours of disgust and weariness, in the evil excitement of Paris, the thought of this peaceful little place was sweet and calming. The pure wafts of air which came to me from there had a refreshing effect upon my congested brains, they soothed my heart burned by the corrosive acids which are carried along by the infected air of cities, and I often promised myself that whenever I got tired of always chasing dreams, I would seek refuge there amid the peace and serenity of native objects. . . . Saint-Michel! . . . Never was the place so dear to me as after I had left it; it seemed to me that it contained riches and beauty such as I had never known how to enjoy and which I now suddenly discovered... I loved to direct my memories there, best of all I loved to recall the forest, the beautiful forest where, as a restless, dreamy child, I had lost my way so many times. . . . Inhaling with keen delight the aroma of the rich sap of trees, the ear enchanted by the harmonies of the wind which caused the underwood and forest trees to vibrate like harps and violin cellos, I lost myself in the large alleys overhung with trembling foliage, large, straight alleys which far, far away ended abruptly and opened up like a church bay upon the light of a pane of sky, arched and luminous. . . .

In these dreams I saw the branches of oak trees reach out their foliage greener than ever, happy to

find me again; young staddles greeted me with a joyous rustle as I passed by; they seemed to say to me: "Look how big we grew, how smooth and strong our trunks are, how good the air in which we spread out our slender, swaying boughs, how bountiful the soil in which we sink our roots always full of life — giving sap." The moss and peat mould called me: "We have prepared a nice bed for you, little fellow, a nice fragrant little bed such as you won't find in the miserably gilded houses of the big cities. . . . Stretch yourself out, roll on it if you are too warm, the fern will sway its gentle fans over your head, the beech trees will spread their branches open to let through a sunbeam which will gladden your heart." Alas! ever since I fell in love with Juliette — these voices have gradually become silent. These memories no longer came back like guardian angels to lull me to sleep and to gently stir their white wings in the agitated azure of my dreams! . . . My past had become estranged from me, ashamed of me! . . .

The train sped on; it had cleared the plains of Beauce, even more melancholy to look at than in the grim days of the war. . . . And I recognized the small, humpy fields, their hedges of brushwood, the scattered apple trees, the narrow valleys, the poplars with their tops bent in the shape of hoods, which in the fields resembled a strange procession of blue penitents, the farms with high mossgrown roofs, highways deep cut and rough, bordered with girdled trees, which slanted down in the midst of sturdy verdure, the woods down yonder, black against the setting sun. . . . It was getting dark when I arrived at Saint-Michel. I liked it better so. . . . To cross the streets in full daylight, under the gaze of all these excellent people who had known me as a child, would have been too painful for me. . . . It seemed to me that I was laden with so

much shame that they would turn away from me with horror as from a mangy dog. . . . I quickened my pace, rolling up the collar of my overcoat. . . . The grocery owner, named Madame Henriette, who in the past used to stuff me with cake, was standing in front of her store and talking to her neighbors. . . . I was afraid they might be talking about me and, leaving the sidewalk I took to the roadway. . . . Fortunately a cart passed by, the noise of which drowned the words of these women: The Presbytery. . . the Convent of the Sisters. . . the church. . . the Priory! . . . At this hour the Priory was nothing but a huge black mass in the sky. . . . My heart failed me. . . . I had to lean against one of the posts of the gate to catch my breath. . . . A few steps away the forest murmured, its dull voice growing in amplitude, angry, like the raging roar of breakers. . . .

Marie and Felix were waiting for me. . . . Marie older and more wrinkled, Felix, more stooping and shaking his head more than ever. . . .

"Ah! Monsieur Jean! . . . Monsieur Jean! . . ." And forthwith taking possession of my valise, Marie said:

"You ought to be pretty hungry by this time, Monsieur Jean! . . . I have some soup for you, the kind you used to like, and then I have put a nice chicken on the spit."

"Thank you!" I said. "I shall not dine."

I would have liked to embrace both of them, to open my arms for them, to cry upon their old, parched faces. . . And instead! my voice was harsh, trenchant. I uttered "I shall not dine" in the manner of a threat. They looked at me somewhat frightened, but never stopped repeating:

"Ah! Monsieur Jean! . . . It has been such a long

time! . . . Ah! Monsieur Jean! . . . What a handsome young man you are! . . ."

Then Marie, thinking that she would gain my interest thereby, began telling me the news of the place:

"That poor Monsieur the curé is dead, you know. The new one in his place don't seem to be getting ahead at all, he is too young and anxious. . . . Baptiste has been crushed to death by a tree."

I interrupted her:

"All right, all right, Marie. . . . You'll tell me about it tomorrow."

She took me to my bedroom and asked:

"Shall I bring you a bowl of milk, Monsieur Jean?"

"If you please!"

And closing the door, I flung myself on the lounge and sobbed for a long, long time.

The next day I got up at dawn. . . . The Priory had not changed much: there was only more grass in the alleys, more moss on the steps, and a few trees were dead. Again I saw the gate, the scurfy lawn, the puny looking sorbs, the aged chestnut trees. Again I saw the basin where the little kitten had been shot, the curtain of fir trees which hid the commons from view, the abandoned study; I saw the park, its twisted trees and stone benches that looked like ancient tombs. . . . In the kitchen garden Felix was digging a border bed for flowers. . . . Ah! poor man, how battered his frame was!

He showed me a hawthorn and said:

"That is where you used to come with your poor deceased father to lie in wait for the blackbirds. . . . Do you remember, Monsieur Jean?"

"Yes, yes, Felix!"

"And also the thrush?"

"Yes, yes, Felix!"

I walked away. I could not bear the sight of this

old man any longer, this man who thought he was going to live to the end of his days at the Priory and whom I was about to drive out. . . and where was he to go? . . . He had served us faithfully, he was almost one of our family, poor, unable to gain a livelihood otherwise. And I was going to chase him out! . . . Ah! How could I bring myself to do that?

At breakfast Marie seemed nervous. She walked around my chair, unusually excited.

"Beg pardon!" she said to me at last, "I must clear up all my doubts about this matter. . . . Is it true that you are selling the Priory? . . ."

"Yes, Marie."

The old woman opened wide her eyes, stupefied, and, placing her hands on the table, repeated:

"You are selling the Priory?"

"Yes, Marie."

"The Priory where all your family was born? . . . The Priory where your father and your mother died? . . . The Priory, Holy Jesus!"

"Yes, Marie."

She recoiled as if frightened.

"Then you are a wicked son, Monsieur Jean!"

I made no reply. Marie left the dining room and did not speak to me any more.

Two days later, my business having been attended to, the deed signed, I left. . . . My money was hardly enough to last me a month. . . . I was done for! Overwhelming debts, ignoble debts was all that was left to me! . . . Ah! if the train could only carry me on and on, always further on, never to arrive anywhere! . . . It was only in Paris that I reminded myself that I had not even gone to kneel down at the grave of my father and mother.

Juliette received me tenderly. She embraced me passionately.

"Ah! dear, dear! . . . I thought you would never come back! . . . Five days, just think of it! . . . Next time if you have to go again I want to go with you."

She appeared so affectionate, so truly moved, her caresses gave me such confidence, and then the burden on my soul was so heavy, that I did not hesitate to tell her everything. I took her in my arms and put her on my lap.

"Listen to me, my Juliette," I said to her, "listen to me! . . . I am lost. . . ruined. . . ruined. . . do you hear, ruined! . . . We have only four thousand francs left! . . ."

"Poor boy!" Juliette sighed while placing her head on my shoulder, "poor boy! . . ."

I burst out sobbing, and cried out:

"You understand now that I must leave you. . . . And I am going to die if I do!"

"Come now, you are silly to talk that way. . . . Do you believe I could live without you, my dear? . . . Come now, don't cry, don't grieve so much. . . ."

She dried the tears from my eyes and continued in her voice which grew sweeter with every word.

"First of all we have four thousand francs. . . . We can live four months on that. . . . During these four months you'll work. . . . Let us see if you can't write a good novel in four months! . . . But don't cry, because if you cry, I won't tell you a great secret. . . a great, great secret. . . . Do you know what your little wifie did, who little suspected that herself — do you know? . . . Well, for three days she went to the riding school, she took lessons in horsemanship — and next year when she is well trained, Franconi will engage her. . . . Do you know what a woman rider in a fashionable riding school makes. . . . Two thousand, three thousand francs a month! . . . You see

now, there isn't much to grieve over, my poor little boy!"

All nonsense, all folly seemed logical to me. I clung to it desperately as a shipwrecked sailor clings to the insecure wreckage tossed by the waves. Provided it kept me afloat for an instant, I did not care toward what dangerous reefs, toward what blacker depths it swept me on. I also cleaved to that absurd hope of one doomed to perish, which even on the slaughter stake, which even under the knife, still expects the impossible to happen: a sudden change, an earthly catastrophe which will deliver him from death. I permitted myself to be deluded by the pretty purring of Juliette's words! A firm resolve to work heroically filled my spirit and threw me into raptures. . . . I had visions of multitudes of people bending breathlessly over my books, of theatres where grave and painted men were coming forward and uttering my name to the boundless enthusiasm of the audience. Overcome with fatigue, worn out with emotion, I fell asleep.

We finished dinner. Juliette was even more affectionate than at the time when I came back. Nevertheless, I noticed a sort of uneasiness, a preoccupied air in her. She was sad and gay at one and the same time: What was going on behind this forehead over which clouds were passing? Did she decide to leave me, in spite of all her protestations, and did she want to make our separation easier by lavishing on me all the treasures of her caresses?

"How annoying, my dear!" she said, "I have to go out."

"What do you mean, you have to go out? Now?"

"Why yes, just think of it. That poor Gabrielle is very ill. She is alone — I have promised to come to see her! Oh! but I won't stay very long. . . . About an hour. . . ."

Juliette spoke very naturally. But I don't know why, it seemed to me that she was lying, that she was not going to Gabrielle at all. And suspicion, vague, terrifying suspicion pierced my heart. I said to her:

"Can't you wait till tomorrow?"

"Oh, that's impossible! Don't you understand, I have promised."

"Please, do me a favor! Go tomorrow. . . ."

"That's impossible! Poor Gabrielle!"

"All right! . . . I'll go with you. . . . I'll wait for you at the door! . . ."

Cunningly I studied her. . . . Her face was motionless. . . . No, really her muscles did not betray the least surprise. She answered gently:

"There is no sense in that! . . . You are tired. . . . Go to bed! . . ."

And forthwith I saw the train of her gown stream behind the drawn door curtain like a snake. . . . Juliette is in her dressing room. . . . And with eyes fixed upon the table cloth where the red reflection of a bottle of wine is flitting, I recall that recently some women came to this house, fleshly squint-eyed women, women who had the air of dogs scenting ordure. . . . I remember I had asked Juliette who those women were. One time Juliette answered: "That's the corset maker." Another time she said: "That's the embroiderer." And I believed her! One day I picked up on the carpet a visiting card which read. . . . Madame Rabineau, 114 Rue de Sèze. "Who was this Mme. Rabineau?" Juliette answered: "That's nothing. . . give it here. . . ." And she tore the card up. . . . And fool that I was, I did not even go to the Rue de Sèze to find out! . . . I recall all that. . . . Ah! how could I ever fail to understand? . . . Why didn't I seize them by the neck, these vile dealers in human flesh? . . .

And suddenly a great veil is lifted from my eyes, behind it I see Juliette with defiled body, exhausted and hideous, selling herself to human vultures! . . . Juliette is there, putting on her gloves, in front of me, in a dark dress with a thick veil which hides her features. . . . The shadow of her hand dances upon the table cloth, lengthens out, grows broader, shrinks again, disappears and comes back again. . . . I shall always see this diabolic shadow, always! . . .

"Kiss me, dearie!"

"Don't go out Juliette, don't go out, I implore you!"

"Embrace me. . . closer. . . closer yet. . . ."

She is sad. . . . Through the thick veil I feel on my cheek the moisture of a tear.

"Why do you cry, Juliette. . . . Juliette, for pity's sake, stay with me!"

"Embrace me. . . . I adore you, my Jean. . . . I adore you! . . ."

She is gone. . . . Doors open, close again. . . . She is gone. . . . Outside I hear the noise of a rolling carriage. The noise grows fainter and fainter and dies out. . . . She is gone! . . .

And here I, too, am on the street. . . . A cab passes by — 114, Rue de Sèze!

My mind was made up quickly. . . . I figured that I would come there before she could. . . . She perfectly understood that I was not taken in by that story of Gabrielle's illness. . . . My anxiety, my eagerness no doubt inspired her with the fear of being spied after, followed, and most likely she would not go to the place immediately. But why did just this abominable thought flash through my mind like lightning? . . . Why only this possibility and no other? . . . I still hope that my presentiments have deceived me, that

Madame Rabineau "is nothing," that Gabrielle is really sick!

Some kind of a small hotel hedged in between two tall buildings, a narrow door hollowed out in the wall at the end of three steps; a dark façade, whose closed windows let no light penetrate. . . . It's here! . . . It is here she is going to come, where she already came perhaps! . . . Rage drives me toward this door. . . . I should like to set this house on fire; I should like to make all those detestable ladies hidden there shriek and writhe in agony, in some hellish blaze. . . . Presently a woman enters, singing and swaying her body, her hands in the pockets of her light jacket. . . . Why did not I spit in her face? . . . An old man has come out of his coupé. He passed close to me, snorting, panting, supported under his arm by his valet. . . . His trembling feet are unable to carry him, between his flabby, swollen eyelids there glimmers a light of beastly dissipation. . . . Why did I not slash the hideous face of this profligate old faun? . . . Perhaps he is waiting for Juliette! . . . The door of the Inferno opened before him — and for an instant my eyes plunged into the pits of hell. . . . I thought I saw red flames, smoke, abominable embraces, the tumbling down of creatures horribly twisted together. . . . But no, it is only a gloomy deserted hallway, lit by the pale shine of a lamp; then at the end of it there is something black like a dark hole, where one feels impure things are stirring. . . . And carriages are stopping in front of the building, dumping out their haul of human dung into this sink of love. . . . A little girl barely ten years old follows me: "Nice violets! Nice violets!". . . I give her a gold piece. "Go away from here, little one, go away! . . . Don't stay here. They will get you! . . ."

My mind is over-exerted. A thousand-toothed sor-

row gnaws at my heart, a thousand claws sink into it, tears it to pieces in a frenzy of grief. . . . A desire to kill is kindled in me and makes my arms go through murderous motions. . . . Ah, to rush, whip in hand, into the midst of this lustful crowd and lash their bodies until ineffaceable marks are left on them, cause their warm blood to spurt, and scatter pieces of their living flesh all over the mirrors, carpets, beds! . . . And nail that Rabineau woman to the door of this house of ill-fame, like an owl on the doors of farm barns, nail her stripped, disemboweled, with her vitals out! . . . A hackney coach has stopped: a woman steps out. I recognize the hat, the veil, the dress.

"Juliette!"

On seeing me, she utters a cry. . . . But she regains her composure quickly. . . . Her eyes defy me.

"Leave me alone," she cries out to me. "What are you doing here? . . . Leave me alone!"

I almost crush her wrists, and in a suffocating voice which rattles:

"Listen now. . . . If you make another step. . . . if you say another word. . . I'll knock you dead right here — on this sidewalk, and tramp you to death under my feet."

With a heavy blow I strike her in the face and with my nails I furiously claw her forehead and cheeks from which blood is gushing.

"Jean! Oh! Jean! . . . Have mercy, please! . . . Jean, mercy; Mercy! . . . Have pity on me! . . . You are killing me. . . ."

Rudely I drag her toward the carriage. . . and we get in. . . . Huddled up in two, she sits there right close to me, sobbing. . . . What am I going to do now? . . . I don't know. . . . In truth I don't know. I don't ask myself any questions. I don't think of anything. . . . It seems as though a mountain of stone

has descended upon me. . . . I feel the heavy rocks on which my neck has crashed, against which my flesh has been bruised. . . . Why, with all the black despair in which I find myself, do these high walls rise up towards heaven? Why these dismal birds flying about in unexpected sunshine? . . . Why is this thing crouched down beside me crying? . . . Why? . . . I don't know. . . .

I am going to kill her. . . . She is in her bedroom without lights, in bed. . . . I am in the dressing room pacing up and down. . . I am walking back and forth with constrained breath, my head on fire, with clinched fists eager to inflict punishment. . . . I am going to kill her! . . . From time to time I stop near the door and listen. . . . She is crying. . . . And in a minute I will enter. . . . I will enter and pull her off the bed, drag her by the hair, knock her senseless, break her neck against the marble edges of the fireplace. . . . I want the room to be red with her blood. . . . I want to see her body beaten into lumps of battered flesh which I shall throw out with the rest of the rubbish and which the garbage man will take away tomorrow. . . . Cry, cry! . . . In a minute you'll howl, my dearest! . . . Haven't I been stupid! . . . To think of everything but that! . . . To fear everything except that! . . . To say to myself: "she will leave me" and never, never: "she will deceive me. . . ." To have failed to divine the nature of this den, this old man, all this filth! . . . Really I had never thought of it before, blind fool that I was. She must have laughed when I implored her not to leave me! . . . To leave me. . . . Ah! yes, to leave me! . . . She did not want to, of course. . . . Now I understand it. . . . I inspired her neither with probity of heart nor with decency of conduct; I was to her just a label, a trade mark. . . a mark of superior value! . . . Yes, when they saw

her in my arms and therefore priced her more highly, she could sell herself for much more than she would have received if, like a nocturnal ghoul, she had roamed the sidewalks and haunted the obscene shadows of the streets. . . . She had swallowed my fortune in one gulp. . . . Her lips had rendered my mentality sterile at the first touch——. Now she is gambling with my honor, that is consistent. . . . With my honor! . . . How could she know that I had none left? . . .

But am I really going to kill her? . . . When one is dead, everything is forgotten! . . . One bares one's head before the coffin of a criminal, one bows in sadness before the dead body of a prostitute. . . . In the churches, believers kneel down and pray for those who have suffered, for those who have sinned. . . . At the cemeteries reverence watches over the graves and the cross protects them. . . . To die is to be forgiven! . . Yes, death is beautiful, holy, noble! . . . Death is the beginning of the great eternal light. . . . Ah, to die! . . . to stretch oneself out on a mattress softer than the softest most in birds' nests. . . . To think no more . . . To hear the noise of life no longer! . . . To feel the infinite sweetness of nothingness! . . . To be a soul! . . .

I shall not kill her. . . . I shall not kill her because she has to suffer. . . terribly, always. . . . Let her suffer in all her beauty, in all her pride, in her exposed carnality of a prostitute! . . . I shall not kill her, but I shall disfigure her to such an extent, I shall make her look so repulsive that people, frightened, will flee at the sight of her. . . . And every evening I shall compel her to appear on the streets, at the theatre, everywhere with her nose crushed, her eyes bulging out from under eyelids fringed with black rings, without a veil! . . .

Suddenly sobs from my throat. . . . I fling myself on the couch, biting the cushion, and cry and cry! . . . Minutes, hours pass and I am still crying! . . . Ah! Juliette, vile Juliette! . . . Why did you do that? . . . Why? . . . Could you not say to me: "Here now, you are not rich any more and all I want of you is money. . . . Leave me!" That would have been cruel, it might have meant my death. . . . But what of it? . . . It would have been better. . . . How can I look into your face now? . . . How can our mouths ever touch each other? . . . There is now between us the thick wall of that wicked place! . . . Ah! Juliette! . . . Wretched Juliette! . . .

I remember her going out. . . . I recollect everything! . . . I recall how she was dressed in her gray dress, the shadow of her hand dancing strangely on the back of her neck. . . . I see her as clearly as if she were before me now, and even more so. . . . She was sad, she was crying. . . . I am sure it was not mere imagination on my part. . . she was actually crying, for my cheek was wet with her tears! Whom was she crying over, me or herself? Ah! . . who knows? . . . I remember. . . . I said to her: "Don't go out, my Juliette! . . ." She replied: "Embrace me closely, very closely, more closely yet! . . ." And her caresses had the passion of despair in them, a kind of shrivelling grip, a sort of fear as if she had wanted to cling to me, to seek tremblingly protection in my arms. . . . I can see her eyes, her beseeching look. . . They seemed to implore me: "Something abominable is drawing me on. . . . Hold me back! . . . I am close to your heart. . . do not let me go! . . . And instead of taking her in my arms, carrying her away, hiding her and loving her so as to make her giddy with happiness, I opened up my arms and let her go! . . . She sought refuge in my love, and I denied it to her. . .

She cried to me: "I adore you, I adore you! . . ." And I stood there like a fool, amazed as is a child at the unexpected flapping of the wings of a captive bird that has just escaped. . . . I did not understand that sadness, those tears, those caresses, those words more tender than usual, that trembling. . . . It is only now that I hear those silent, melancholy words: "My dear Jean, I am a poor little woman, a little foolish and so weak! . . . I had no idea of anything big or worth while. . . . Who was there to teach me what chastity, duty, virtue meant! . . . When I was a child yet, evil surroundings contaminated me, and vice was taught to me by the very people who were supposed to be my guardians. . . Still I am not wicked and I love you. . . . I love you more than I ever loved you! . . . My beloved Jean, you are strong, you know many beautiful things which I don't. . . . Well, protect me! . . . An overpowering desire draws me there. . . . The trouble is I have seen too much jewelry, too many gowns and other exquisite and expensive trifles which you can't buy me any longer but which others have promised to get me! . . . I have an instinctive feeling that it's wrong and that it will cause you suffering. . . . Well, subdue me! . . . I ask for no other chance than to be good and virtuous. . . . Teach me how! . . . Beat me. . . if I resist! . . ."

Poor Juliette! . . . It seems to me that she is down on her knees before me, with clasped hands. . . . Tears are rolling from her eyes, from her big eyes downcast and sweet. . . . Tears are streaming from her eyes endlessly as they used to stream from the eyes of my mother in the past. . . . And at the thought that I wanted to kill her, that I wanted to disfigure her delightful and sorrowful face through horrible mutilation, I am seized with remorse and my wrath gives way to pity. . . . She goes on. . . . "Forgive

me! . . . Oh! my Jean you must forgive me. . . . It is not my fault, I assure you. . . . Try to recall. . . . Did you ever warn me, even once? . . . Did you ever show me even once the way which I should follow? Through weakness, through fear of losing me, through excessive and criminal kindness, you have yielded to all my whims, even the most wicked ones. . . . How could I know that it was wrong, when you have never told me anything? . . . Instead of stopping me on the brink of the precipice where I was headed, you yourself have pushed me into it. . . . What example have you placed before my eyes? . . . Whither have you led me? . . . Have you ever tried to take me out of this alarming atmosphere of debauchery? . . . Why didn't you chase Jesselin or Gabrielle out of our house, all those degenerates whose very presence only helped to increase my wickedness? . . . To breathe into me a particle of your own soul, to send a ray of light into the darkness of my brains — that is what you should have done! . . . Yes, you should have given me another life, you should have made me over again! . . . I am guilty, my Jean! . . . And I am so ashamed of myself that I can never hope to be able to atone for the infamy of this evil hour even with a whole life of sacrifice and repentance. . . . But you! . . . Is your conscience satisfied that you have done your duty? . . . I dread not the expiation of my sins. . . . On the contrary I welcome it, I want it. . . . But you? . . . Can you sit in judgment over a crime which I admit I have committed, but in which you, too, have had a part since you have not done anything to prevent it! . . . My dear beloved, listen to me. . . . This body which I have attempted to defile horrifies you; hereafter you will not be able to look at it without rage and anguish. . . . All right then, let it perish! . . . Let it rot in the oblivion of a graveyard! . . . There

shall be left to you my soul, it belongs to you, for it has never forsaken you, for it loves you. . . . See how white and pure it is. . . ."

A knife glistens in Juliette's hands. . . . She is going to kill herself with it. . . . I grasp her arms, I shout: "No, no, Juliette, no, I don't want you to! . . . I love you! . . . No, no. . . . I don't want you to!"

My arms are brought together in an embrace, but I enclose nothing but space. . . . I look around me, frightened, the place is empty! . . . I look again. . . . The gas is burning with a yellow flame over the dressing table. . . rumpled skirts are strewn all over the carpet. . . shoes lie scattered about. . . . And pale daylight is stealing into the room through the open spaces in the shutters. . . . I begin to fear in earnest that Juliette may kill herself, for otherwise why should this vision arise before me? . . . On tip-toe, quietly I walk toward the door and listen. . . . A feeble sigh reaches my ear, then a wailing, then a sob. . . . And like a fool I rush into the room. . . . A voice speaks to me in the darkness, the voice of Juliette:

"Ah! my Jean! My dear little Jean!"

And chastely, as Christ kissed Magdalene, I kissed her on the forehead.

CHAPTER VIII

"LIRAT! Ah, at last it is you! For a week I have been looking for you, have been writing to you, have been calling you, have been waiting for you. . . . Lirat, my dear Lirat, save me!"

"What? My God! What's wrong?"

"I want to kill myself."

"Kill yourself! Well, that's an old story. Come, there is no danger."

"I want to kill myself! I want to kill myself! . . ."

Lirat looked at me, blinked his eyes and paced up and down the study with long strides.

"My poor Mintié!" he said, "if you were a statesman, a stockbroker or. . . . Well, I don't know. . . say a grocer, an art critic, or a journalist, I would say to you: 'You are unhappy and you have had enough of life, my boy! Go ahead, kill yourself!' And with these words I would leave you. But here you have that rare opportunity of being an artist, you possess that divine gift of seeing, understanding, feeling things which others can't see, can't understand and can't feel! There are harmonies in nature which exist only for you and which others will never hear. . . you have all the real joys of life, the only joys, the noble, grand and pure ones, the joys which make you forget men and which render you almost Godlike. And because some woman has deceived you, you want to renounce all that? She has deceived you; it is evident that she has deceived you. . . . Well, what else did you expect her to do? And what concern is it of yours, even if she has? . . ."

"Please don't jeer at me. You don't know anything,

Lirat. You don't suspect anything. I am lost, dishonored!"

"Dishonored, my friend? Are you sure of it? Do you have unclean debts? You'll pay them off!"

"It is not a question of that! I am dishonored! dishonored, do you understand? It has been four months since I have given Juliette any money. . . four months! And here I live, I eat, have my amusements. Every evening. . . before dinner. . . late at night. . . . Juliette re-enters the house. She is worn-out, pale, her hair disheveled. From what dens, what alcoves, what arms is she returning? Upon what pillows has her head reclined! Sometimes I see pieces of bed clothes insolently hanging on the top of her hair. . . . She no longer feels ashamed of it, she does not even take the trouble to lie about it. . . one might think it had been arranged between us. She undresses, and I believe she takes a perverse delight in showing me her ill-fastened skirts, her unlaced corset, all the disorder of her rumpled clothes, of her loosened garments which come off, falling to the ground about her, and lie conspicuously on the floor, filling the bedroom with the breath of other people!

"I tremble with rage and want to sink my teeth into her body; my wrath is kindled to a frenzy and boils within me — I feel like killing her. And I say nothing! Often I even come up to her to embrace her. . . but she pushes me away: 'No, leave me alone, I am tired!' At first, when this abominable life started, I used to beat her. . . for you must know, Lirat, there isn't a disgraceful act that I have not committed. I have exhausted every form of indecency — yes, I beat her! She bent her back. . . and hardly uttered a complaint. One evening I seized her by the throat, I threw her to the ground. Oh! I had quite made up my mind to finish her. While I was strangling her, I turned my head

away for fear that I might be moved to pity, fixed my gaze upon a flower design on the carpet, and in order to hear nothing, neither her wailing nor rattling, I shrieked out inarticulate words, like a possessed one. How long did it last? Soon she ceased struggling. . . her muscles relaxed. . . . I felt her vitality giving out under my fingers. . . a few more convulsions. . . and that was the end. . . She did not stir any more. And suddenly I saw her black-blue face, her contracted eyes, her mouth, large and wide open, her rigid body, her motionless arms. And like a madman I rushed into every room of the apartment, calling the servants: "Help, help, I have killed Madame! I have killed Madame!"

"I fled, tumbling down the stairway, without a hat, dashed into the caretakers: 'Go upstairs quickly, I have killed Madame!' Then I darted out on the street, in a frenzy. The whole night I was running without knowing whither, rushing along the boulevards, crossing bridges, dashing against benches in the parks and mechanically turning back toward the house. It seemed to me that through its closed shutters there penetrated the light of wax tapers; priests' vestments, surplices, eucharists passed before me in confusion; it seemed to me that I could hear funeral chants, the rumble of organs, the noise of ropes rubbing against the wood of the coffin. I pictured Juliette stretched out on the bed, dressed in a white robe, her hands clasped, a crucifix on her breast and flowers about her. And I was surprised not to see black draperies on the door, or a hearse with flowers and wreaths at the entrance outside, or people in mourning fighting for a chance to be sprinkled with holy water.

"Oh, Lirat, what a night that was! How did I ever manage not to throw myself under the wheels of the carriages, crash my head against the housewall,

or plunge into the Seine. I don't know! . . . Day came. . . . I had a notion to surrender to the police. I wanted to go up to a policeman on the street and say to him: 'I have killed Juliette. . . . Arrest me!' But thoughts, each wilder than the other, came to my mind, clashed and yielded to others. And I ran and ran as if pursued by a pack of barking hounds. . . . It was Sunday, I remember. There were many people on the streets flooded with sunshine. I was sure that all looked at me, that these people, seeing me run, cried out in horror: 'Here is Juliette's murderer!'

"Toward evening, worn out, on the verge of collapsing on the sidewalk, I met Jesselin! 'I say,' he exclaimed, 'you have done a nice thing, you have!' 'Do you already know it?' 'Why, all Paris knows it, dear friend. A little while ago, at the races, Juliette showed us her neck and the marks which your fingers had left on it. She said: "Jean did this to me." Why, man you are getting on fine!' And while parting, he added: 'For the rest, she has never been more beautiful. And such a success!' And so you see that while I believed her to be dead, she was promenading at the racetrack. I had left the house and she could have thought that I would never come back again, and yet she went to the races. . . prettier than ever!"

Lirat gravely listened to me. He was not pacing about any more; he seated himself and shook his head.

"What do you want me to tell you? You must go away."

"Go away?" I rejoined. "I should go away? But I don't want to! An adhesive force like glue which is getting thicker every day holds me fast to her carpets, a chain growing heavier every day holds me riveted to her walls. I can't leave her! Look, at this very moment I am dreaming of committing all sorts of mad, heroic acts. To cleanse myself of all this base-

ness, I am ready to throw myself in front of the fire-spitting muzzles of a hundred cannons. I feel myself strong enough to crush whole formidable armies single handed. When I walk on the street I look for runaway horses, fires or any other dangerous adventure where I can sacrifice my life. There is not a perilous or superhuman deed that I have not the courage to perform. But, that! I can not do!

"At first I offered myself the most ridiculous excuses, I gave myself the most illogical reasons for not leaving her. I said to myself that if I left her, Juliette would sink to even lower depths; that my love for her had in some manner been her last vestige of decency which I should finally succeed in restoring by saving her from the mire in which she wallowed. Truly I had been repaid by the luxury of pity and self sacrifice. But I was lying! I simply can't leave her! I can't because I love her, because the more depraved she is the more I love her. Because I want her, do you hear, Lirat? And if you only knew what it means to me, this love, what frenzies, what shame, what tortures? If you only knew to what depths of Hell passion can sink, you would be horrified! At night when she is asleep, I prowl about in her dressing room, opening drawers, digging among the cinders of the fire place, putting together pieces of torn letters, smelling the linens which she has just removed, devoting myself to the vilest spying, to the most shameful searching! It was not enough for me to know; I had to see as well! I have no longer a mind, a heart, or anything. I am just the embodiment of disordered, raving, famished sex, which demands its share of living flesh, like the fallow-deer that howl in their frenzy on rutting nights."

I was exhausted. . . the words came out of my throat with a hissing sound. . . still I continued.

"Ah! It is beyond all comprehension! Sometimes it

happens that Juliette is sick. Her members, overstrained by pleasure, refuse to obey her; her constitution, worn out by nervous shocks, revolts. She takes to her bed. If you could only see her then? A child, Lirat, a sweet and touching child! She dreams only of the country, little brooks, green prairies, simple joys: 'Oh, my dear, she exclaims, 'with ten thousand francs of income, how happy we should be!' She makes all sorts of Virgilian and charming plans. 'We ought to go far, far away, to live in a house surrounded by tall trees. She will raise chickens which will lay eggs she herself will take out of the hatching place every morning; she will make cream, cheese; and she will wear aprons like this and straw hats like that, jogging along pathways astride a donkey that she will call Joseph. Geeho! Joseph, Geeho! Ah, how nice it will be!'

"When I hear her say that, I feel hope returning and I let myself be taken in by that impossible dream of a rustic life with Juliette disguised as a shepherdess. Quiet landscapes like places of refuge, enchanting like a paradise, unroll before us. . . . and we grow exalted and enthusiastic. Juliette cries: 'My poor little thing, I have caused you suffering, but now it's all over. I promise you. And then I am going to have a trained ram, am I not? A beautiful ram, very big, all white, around whom I shall tie a bow of red ribbon, and who will follow me everywhere together with Spy, not so, dear?' She insists that I have my dinner in front of her bed, on a little table, and she coddles me like a nurse and caresses me like a mother; she makes me eat as one does a child, repeating without end and with agitation in her voice: 'My poor little thing!'

"At other moments she becomes thoughtful and grave: 'My dear, I would like to ask you something

that has been worrying me for a long time; promise that you'll tell me.' I promise. 'Well, when one is dead, in the coffin, is it true that one's feet rest against the board?' 'What an idea! Why do you speak of it?' 'Tell me, please tell me!' 'But I don't know, my dear Juliette!' 'Don't you know? Although it is true that you never know anything when I am serious. . . because. . . you see? . . . I don't want my feet to rest against the board. When I am dead. . . you shall put a cushion inside and my white dress. . . you know the one with pink flowers. . . the dress for which I won the first prize! You'll be very sorry, my poor little thing, won't you? Embrace me! Come over here, closer to me, still closer. I adore you!'

"And I used to wish that Juliette were sick all the time! But as soon as she recovers she does not remember anything; her promises, her resolutions are gone and our life of hell begins again, more violent and exasperating than ever. And from that little bit of heaven to which I have held on for a while, I tumble down again into the filth and crime of this love even more frightfully maimed in spirit! Ah! that is not all, Lirat! I should have stayed in that apartment to brood over my shame, don't you think! I should have withdrawn into obscurity and oblivion sufficient to make people believe that I am dead. And instead of that! Well! Go to the Bois and you see me there every day. At the theatre it is I whom you will find in the stage box, in a dress suit, with a flower in my buttonhole, always I! Juliette is resplendent amidst flowers, plumes and gems. She is exquisite, she has a new dress which everyone admires, a stock of smiles each more modest than the other, and the string of pearls for which I have not paid, which she toys gracefully with the tips of her fingers and without the least remorse. And here I have not a sou, not a sou! And I

am at the end of my rope, having exhausted all my swindling tricks and crooked schemes! Often I tremble. It seems to me that the heavy hand of a gendarme is bearing down upon me. Already I hear the painful whisper, I catch the stealthy looks of contempt.

"Little by little emptiness broadens and recedes all around me as around a pestiferous person. Old friends pass by, turn their heads away, avoid me in order not to greet me. . . . And unwillingly I assume the sly and servile manner of disreputable people who walk with eyes asquint and cringing back in search of an outstretched hand! The horrible thing about it, you see, is that I am perfectly conscious of the fact that it is Juliette's beauty that protects me. It is the desire which she awakens, it is her mouth, it is the mystery of her nude and defiled body which in this pleasure-seeking world shields me with a false esteem, with a lying semblance of respect. A handshake, a grateful look seems to say: 'I have been with your Juliette, and I owe that to you. Perhaps you prefer money? Do you want it?' Yes, just let me quit Juliette and with one kick I shall even be thrown out of this crowd, this facile, fawning and perverted crowd and shall be reduced to sordid association with gamblers and pimps!"

I burst out sobbing. Lirat did not stir, did not raise his head. Motionless, with clasped hands he was looking at something I knew not what. . . nothing, I suppose. After a few moments of silence I continued:

"My good Lirat, do you remember our talks in your studio! I used to listen to you, and what you told me was so beautiful! Without suspecting it, perhaps, you awoke noble desires and sublime raptures in me. You breathed into me a little of the belief, ambition and lofty flights of your soul. You taught

me how to read nature, to understand her passionate tongue, to feel the emotions latent in things. You proved to me the existence of immortal beauty. You said to me: 'Love, why it is in the earthenware pitcher, it is in the verminous rags which I paint. To take a feeling, a joy, a moment of suffering, of palpitation, a vision, a shudder — anything, no matter how fugitive an experience of life it may be — and recreate it, fix it in colors, in words or sounds, means to love! Love is a man's yearning to create!'

"And I dreamed of becoming a great artist! Ah! my dreams, my delights in being able to perceive things, my doubts, my sacred agonies, do you remember them? Look what I have done with all that! I wanted to love and I went to a woman who kills love. I started with wings, drunk with the air, with the azure, with light! And now I am nothing but a dirty hog, sunk in its filth, with greedy snout and sides shaking with impure rutting. You can see for yourself, Lirat, that I am lost, lost, lost! . . and that I must kill myself."

Then Lirat approached and put both hands on my shoulders:

"You say you are lost! Let us see now; when one is of your stock, can one say that a man's life is lost? You say you must kill yourself? Does a man who has typhoid fever say: 'I must kill myself?' He says: 'I must cure myself!' You have typhoid fever, my poor child. . . cure yourself. Lost! Why, there is not a crime, do you hear me, there is not a crime, no matter how monstrous and vile, that can not be redeemed by forgiveness. I don't mean God's forgiveness or man's forgiveness, but one's own forgiveness, which is much more difficult and more worth while to obtain. Lost! I was listening to you, my dear Mintié, and do you know what I was thinking? I was thinking that you

had the noblest and most beautiful soul that I ever knew. No, no. . . a man who accuses himself as you do. . . who puts into his confession of sin the heart-rending accents which you have put in yours just now. . . why no — that man is never lost. On the contrary, he finds himself again and he is near redemption. Love has passed over you and has left all the more filth in its wake because of your extremely delicate nature. Well! You must wash this filth off — and I know where the water is that will wash it off. You are going to leave this place. . . leave Paris."

"Lirat!" I entreated, "don't ask me to leave! I have tried it twenty times and I cannot do it."

"You are going away," repeated Lirat, whose face suddenly darkened. "Or else I am mistaken about you, and you are a scamp!"

He resumed:

"In the heart of Brittany there is a fishing village, which is called Le Ploch. The air there is pure, nature is superb, man rugged and kind. It is there that you are going to live three months, six months, a year if necessary. You will walk along the sandy shore, across the heath, through pine forests, over rocks; you will dig the soil, you will catch sea wrack, you will lift logs, you will shout in the wind. There, at last, you will subdue this poisoned body insane with love. In the beginning it will be hard for you and you will perhaps feel homesick. . . you will rebel, you will be seized with passionate desires to return. Don't be discouraged, I beseech you. On days especially hard to bear, walk all the more. . . spend nights out on the sea with the brave people of the place. . . and when your heart is heavy, weep, weep. Above all, keep from leading an indolent life, from dreaming, from reading, from carving your name on the rocks and tracing it on the sand. Don't think of anything, don't think at

all! On such occasions, literature and art are poor counsellors, they are apt to bring you back to love again. Incessant activity of your body, hard physical labor, your flesh worn out by crushing fatigue, your head lashed and made giddy by the wind, by the rain, by storms! I tell you, you will come back from that place not only cured but stronger than ever and better armed for struggle. And you shall have paid your debt to that monster. You say, you shall have paid it with your fortune? Well what of it, that's nothing. Why, I envy you and wish I could go with you. Come, my dear Mintié, a little courage! Go!"

"Yes, Lirat, you are right. I must go away."

"Well go then!"

"I am going away tomorrow, I swear!"

"Tomorrow? Ah, tomorrow! She is going to come back, isn't that the idea? And you will throw yourself in her arms again. No, go now!"

"Let me write to her. I can't leave her like this, without a word, without saying good bye to her. Lirat just think! In spite of all this suffering, in spite of all this shame, there still are happy memories, blissful hours. She is not wicked. . . she simply does not know. . . that's all. . . but she loves me. I shall go away, I promise you I shall. But give me just one more day! One more day! One day is not much, especially since I shall not see her any more! Ah, one more day!"

"No, go now!"

"Lirat! My good Lirat!"

"No!"

"But I have no money! How do you expect me to go without money?"

"I have enough left to last you over the trip; I'll send it to you there. Go!"

"At least let me get my things ready!"

"I have some wool stockings and caps; that's what you need. Go!"

He hurried me away. Without seeing anything, without realizing anything, I went through the apartment, bumping into pieces of furniture. I did not feel any pain, for I was insensible to everything; I was walking behind Lirat with the heavy step and the passive gait of a beast led to slaughter.

"Well where is your hat?"

"That's right! I went out without a hat. I did not think that I was abandoning, that I was leaving behind anything that was a part of me; that the things which I saw, in the midst of which I lived, were dying one after another as soon as I passed by them."

The train left at eight o'clock in the evening. Lirat did not leave me all day. Wishing, no doubt, to occupy my mind and to keep my will power at its highest pitch, he spoke to me with broad gestures; but I did not hear anything except a confused noise, annoying me and buzzing about my ears like pestering flies. We dined in a restaurant near the Mont Parnasse railroad station. Lirat continued to talk, stupefying me with gestures and words, tracing strange geographic lines with his knife on the table.

"Look, there's where it is! Then you will follow this side. . . and. . ."

I believe he was giving me instructions about my trip to the place of exile I was bound for. . . told me the names of villages, persons. The word 'sea' recurred again and again with the rumble of pebbles washed by the waves and rubbing against one another.

"Will you remember?"

And without knowing exactly what he referred to, I answered:

"Yes, yes, I'll remember."

It was only at the station, this vast building, filled

with noise and bustle, that I realized my situation. I felt terribly downhearted. And so I was going away! It's all over then! Never again shall I see Juliette, never again! At this moment I forgot all my suffering, my shame, my ruin, the irreparable conduct of Juliette and remembered only our brief moments of happiness, and I rebelled against the injustice of being separated from my well-beloved. Lirat meantime was saying:

"And then, if you only knew what a bliss it is to live among the lowly, to study their poor but worthy life, their resignation of martyrs, their. . . ."

I had a notion to escape his surveillance, to flee then and there. A foolish hope kept me from doing that. I said to myself: 'Celestine will no doubt bring word to Juliette that Lirat has been at the house, that he has led me away by force; she will understand at once that something horrible is happening, that I am at this station, that I am going to leave. And she will come running.' I really believed she would. So strong was my faith that through the large open windows, I watched the people who were entering; I searched among the various groups, examined closely the dense crowd of passengers standing in front of the track gate. And whenever some elegant lady appeared I gave a start, ready to dart toward her. Lirat went on:

"And to think that there are some people who consider them brutes, these heroes! Ah! you will see those magnificent brutes with their horny hands, their eyes full of infinitude, and their backs which make one weep."

Even on the platform I was still hoping for Juliette's arrival. Surely in a second she will be here, pale, vanquished, suppliant, with outstretched arms: "My Jean, my Jean, I was a bad woman, forgive me! Don't bear me ill-will on account of that, don't forsake me. What do you expect me to become, without you? Oh, come

back, my Jean, or else take me along!" And silhouettes flitted and disappeared in the cars; fantastic shadows crept along and split against the walls; long whitish columns of smoke spread out under the vaulted roof...

"Embrace me, my dear Mintié. Embrace me!"

Lirat drew me close to his breast. He was crying. "Write to me as soon as you get there. Good bye!"

He pushed me into a car and drew the door curtain. "Good bye!"

A whistle, then a dull rolling. . . then lights chasing one another. . . things receding somewhere. . . then nothing. . . except black night. Why did Juliette not come? Why? And in the midst of rumpled skirts on the carpets, in her dressing room, in front of her looking glass, I clearly see her, bare-shouldered, applying rice powder to her face. Celestine with her soft flaccid fingers is sewing on a band of crepe at the bottom of the low cut waist, and a man whom I don't know, reclining on the sofa, with crossed legs, watches Juliette with eyes in which desire is gleaming. The gas is burning, candle lights are blazing, a bouquet of roses which someone has just brought, mingles its more delicate perfume with the violent odors of dresses! And Juliette takes a rose, twists its stem, straightens out its petals and sticks it in the button-hole of the man with a tender smile. A bonnet with hanging strings is perched on top of a chandelier. . . .

And the train is moving on, puffing, panting. The night is ever black, and I am plunging into nothingness. . . .

CHAPTER IX

LYING flat upon the dune, face downward, my elbows sunk in the sand with head buried in my hands, and staring into the space before me, I dream. . . . The sea is in front of me, immense and glaucous, streaked with violet shadows, plowed by mighty billows whose crests, rising and falling back and forth, are white in the sun. The reefs of la Gamelle from time to time uncover the dark points of their rocks and send forth a dull noise like a distant cannonade. Yesterday the tempest broke loose; today the wind has subsided, but the sea still refuses to quiet down. The waves come up, swell, roll, rise, toss up their manes of swirling foam, break into ripples and fall back upon the pebbles, flat and broken, with a frightful roar of rage. But the sky no longer threatens, streaks of blue appear between the rifts of clouds swiftly borne away, and the seagulls are soaring high in the air. The fishing boats have just left the harbor, they are receding in the distance, diminishing, separating, becoming indistinct and finally vanishing. To my right, dominated by sinking dunes, is the strand extending as far as Ploch, which one can see behind a rise in the ground in the midst of dreary verdure, the roofs of the nearest houses, the belfry of granite stone at the end of which there rises a lighthouse. Beyond the pier the eye can see limitless expanses of pink shores, silvery bays, soft-blue cliffs covered with mist, so faint in the distance that they look like columns of vapor, and the ever present sea and the ever present sky which blend together yonder into a sort of mysterious and poignant elimi-

nation of all things. . . . To my left the dune, where the broomrape spreads its corymbs of purple flowers, ends abruptly. The ground rises, becomes steep and the rocks pile up, topple over, form openings of roaring abysses or plunge into the sea, cleaving its body like the prows of giant vessels. Further on there is the beach again.

The sea, held back by the shore, ever turbulent and white with foam, leaps and beats impetuously against the side of the cliffs. And the shore continues jagged, indented and worn away by the eternal onrush of the waves crumbling into a chaotic mass or rising and shaping themselves into awesome shadows against the sky. Over my head flocks of linnets are flying, and above the rage of the waves the wind brings to me the plaint of cock-pigeons and curlews.

It is here that I come every day. Whether it be windy or rainy, whether the sea howl or hum peacefully, whether it be clear or dark, I always come to this place. . . . It is not, however, because the sight impresses and moves me or that the terrible or charming aspect of nature consoles me. I hate this nature; I hate the sea, I hate the sky, the cloud that passes, the wind that blows, the birds that circle in the air; I hate everything that surrounds me, everything that I see, everything that I hear. I come here by force of habit, impelled by an animal instinct which calls animals back to the place that is familiar to them. Like the hare, I have dug my seat in the sand and I always come back to it. Whether it is upon the sand or on the moss, in the shadow of the woods, in the depths of the caves or in the sun of the solitary strand — does not matter!

Where can a man who suffers find refuge? Where look for the voice that soothes! Where can he find compassion which dries the eyes that weep? Oh! I

know these chaste dawns, these gay noon hours, these pensive evenings and starry nights! . . . These endless distances where the soul expands, where sorrows dissolve. . . Ah! I know them! . . . Beyond this horizon line, beyond this sea, are there no countries like the rest? Are there no people, no trees, no noises?

There is no rest, no silence for me! . . . To die! . . But who can assure me that the thought of Juliette will not come to mingle with the worms to eat me up? . . . One stormy day I was face to face with Death and I prayed to be taken by him. But Death turned away from me. . . . He spared me, me who am useless for anything or to anybody, to whom life is more of a torture than the carcass of a condemned criminal or the chain-shot of a galley-slave, and he took another instead — a strong, brave and kindly man for whom poor creatures were waiting! Yes, one time the sea snatched me, rolled me on its waves and then cast me up alive again upon the seashore, as if I were unworthy to perish in it.

The solid mass of clouds breaks up, becomes whiter. The sun showers the sea with rays of brilliant light, the changing green of the sea grows softer, becomes golden in some places and opalescent in others, and near the shore above, the bubbling line is variegated with all the shades of pink and white. The reflections of the sky which the waves endlessly divide, which they break up into a multitude of small fragments of light, glitter upon the agitated surface. Behind the harbor the slender mast of a cutter, which men are towing on the bowline, glides along slowly, then the hull appears, the hauled-up sails swell out, and gradually the vessel moves aways, dancing on the waves. Along the beach which the ebb tide uncovers, an angler is walking hastily, and ship-boys come running to the shore bare-legged, wade in the mud

puddles, pick up rocks covered with seaweed, in search of loaches and crabs. . . . Pretty soon the vessel is nothing but a greyish speck on the horizon line which grows thinner, enveloped in a vacuous fog. . . . One can see that the sea is getting calm.

It is already two months that I have been here! . . two months! . . . I have walked on the roads, in the fields, through the heaths; I know all the grass blades, all the rocks, all the crosses watching over the cross-roads. . . . Like a tramp I have slept in the ditches, my limbs made numb by the cold, and I have crawled to the foot of the rocks, upon beds of humid foliage; I have wandered over the beach and the cliffs, blinded by the sand, lashed by the spray, deafened by the wind; with bleeding hands and bruised knees I have climbed rocks inaccessible to men, haunted only by sea ravens; I have spent sorrowful nights on the sea and I have seen sailors crossing themselves in the terror of death; I have rolled from the tops of huge boulders, and with the water up to my neck, swept by dangerous currents, I have fished sea weeds; I have climbed trees and I have dug the earth with a mattock.

The people here thought that I was out of my mind. My arms are broken. My flesh is bruised. And yet not for a minute, not for a second has my passion deserted me, it has possessed me even more than in the past. I feel how it strangles me, how it squashes my brains, crunches my chest, gnaws my heart, dries up my veins. . . . I am like a small animal attacked by a polecat; no matter how much I roll on the ground desperately struggling with its teeth, the polecat holds me and won't let me go. Why did I go away? . . . Couldn't I hide myself away in a room at some furnished house? . . . Juliette would come to see me from time to time, nobody would know that I existed, and in my obscurity I could enjoy my heavenly as

well as abominable bliss. . . . Lirat had spoken to me of honor, of duty, and I believed him! . . . He had said to me: "Nature will console you." And I believed him! Lirat had lied to me. Nature has no soul. Entirely given over to her eternal labor of destruction, she whispers to me nothing but thoughts of death and crime. Never has she bent over my burning forehead to cool it or stooped over my panting breast to calm it. And infinitude has only brought sorrow closer to me! Now I can no longer resist, and vanquished, I abandon myself to grief, without even making an effort to drive it away occasionally.

Though the sun rise in the splendor of silver gilt dawns, though it go down in purple glory, though the sea display its gems, though everything glitter, sing and emit sweet odors, I don't want to see anything, I don't want to hear anything. . . . I only want to see Juliette in the fugitive outline of the clouds; I only want to hear Juliette in the errant plaint of the wind, and I am ready to kill myself just to grasp her elusive image in the things about me! . . . I see her at the Bois smiling, happy with her freedom. I see her promenading in the stage boxes; I see her especially at night, in her bedroom. Men enter and go out, others come in and leave, all sated with love! By the glimmer of the night lamp, obscene shadows dance and grimace around her bed; laughter, kisses and dull spasms are stifled in the pillows, and with a swooning look, with trembling mouth, she offers everyone her luxurious body which never tires of pleasure. With my brains on fire, sinking my nails into my throat, I shriek: "Juliette! Juliette!" as if it were possible for Juliette to hear me across the space: "Juliette! Juliette!" Alas! the cry of the sea-gulls and the rumbling noise of the waves beating against the rocks are the only things that answer: "Juliette! Juliette!"

And evening comes. . . . The fogs float up, pink and weightless, enveloping the shore, the village, while the jetty, almost black, assumes the appearance of the hull of a huge vessel without masts; the sun inclines its copper-colored ball toward the sea, tracing a path of rippling, crimson light upon its limitless extent. Near the shore the water grows darker, and sparkles flare up on the crests of the waves. At this sad hour I return through the fields, meeting again the same carts pulled by oxen covered with cloths of grey flax, seeing the same silhouettes of peasants who, bent over the niggardly soil, struggle grimly with the heath and the rocks. And upon the heights of Saint-Jean where the windmills rotate their sails in the blue of the sky, the same calvary stretches out its supplicating arms. . . .

I lived at the end of the village with Mother Le Gannec, an excellent woman who took care of me as well as she could. The house which opened on the main road was clean, well-kept, furnished with new and shining furniture. The poor woman strove to please me, worked desperately to invent something that would smooth my brow, that would bring a smile upon my lips. She was really touching. Every time I came down in the morning I would find her, knitting stockings or spinning, finished with her housework, alive, alert, almost pretty in her flat cap, her short black shawl, and her apron of green serge.

"Friend Mintié!" she would exclaim, "I have cooked some nice shell-fish fricassee for supper for you. . . . If you like sea-eel soup better, I'll make you some sea-eel soup."

"Just as you please, Mother Le Gannec."

"But you always say the same thing. Ah! by Jesus! Friend Lirat was not like you at all. 'Mother Le Gannec, I want some oysters and some periwinkles.'

To be sure I gave him some oysters and some periwinkles! . . . But he was never as sad as you are. Why no, indeed!"

And Mother Le Gannec told me some stories about Lirat who stayed with her a whole autumn.

"And he was so lively and so intrepid! . . . He would go out in the rain 'to take some views.' It did not hurt him a bit. He would come back drenched to the bones but always gay, always singing! . . . You ought to have seen that fellow eat! Ah, he could swallow the sea in the morning!"

Sometimes, to distract me, she told me her misfortunes, simply, without complaining, repeating with sublime resignation:

"Whatever the good Lord wishes, we must wish also. To cry over it all the time won't help matters a bit."

And in a musical voice which all Bretons possess, she used to say:

"Le Gannec was the best fisherman in Ploch and the most daring seaman on the entire coast. There was none whose fishing boat was better equipped, none who better knew reefs abounding with fish. Whenever a fishing boat dared out in stormy weather it was sure be the Marie Joseph. Everybody held him in high esteem not only because he was courageous but because his conduct was beyond reproach and worthy. He shunned the cabarets like a pest, detested drunkards, and it was an honor to be of the same mind as he was. I must also tell you that he was the commander of a life boat. We had two boys, friend Mintié, strong, well-built and able, one was eighteen years old and the other twenty, and the father expected both to be brave seamen as he was. . . . Ah! If you had only seen my two handsome boys, friend Mintié! Things were coming along nicely, in fact so nicely

that with our savings we were able to build this house and buy this furniture. And so we were contented! One night, it was two years ago, the father and the boys did not return! I was not alarmed at all. It often happened that he had gone out far, as far as Croisic, Sables or Herbaudière. Was it not his business to follow the fish? But days passed and none showed up! And the days were still passing. . . . And not one came back! Every morning and every evening I used to go to the harbor and look at the sea. . . . I used to ask the fishermen whom I happened to meet: 'Have you seen the Marie Joseph yet?' 'No,' someone would answer, 'I wonder why they haven't come back?' 'I don't know.' 'Do you think some misfortune happened to them?' 'It's quite possible!' And while saying this the fisherman would cross himself. Then I burned three candles at the Notre Dame du Bon Voyage! . . . Finally one day, they came back, all three of them, in a big cart, black, swollen, half devoured by crabs and starfishes. . . . Dead. . . . Dead. . . . . all three of them, my man and my two handsome boys. The keeper of the Penmarch lighthouse had found them washed upon the rocks."

I was not listening and was thinking of Juliette. Where is she? Why does she keep silent? Eternal questions!

Mother Le Gannec continued:

"I don't know your affairs, friend Mintié, and I don't know why you are so unhappy, but you have not lost your man and your two boys at one stroke as I have! And even if I don't cry, friend Mintié, that does not keep me from feeling sad, you see!"

And when the wind howled, when the sea rumbled from afar, she would add with a grave voice:

"Holy Virgin, have pity on our poor children over yonder on the sea."

While I was thinking:

"Perhaps she is dressing now. Maybe she is still sleeping, worn out during the night."

I used to go out, walk through the village and seat myself on a stump on the Quimper road, at the foot of a long acclivity, waiting for the postman to arrive. The road, laid out in the midst of rocks, is flanked on one side by a long embankment topped by fir trees, on the other side it dominates a small arm of the sea, which winds round the heath, bare and flat, in the midst of which puddles are shining. Here and there cones of grey rock rise up in the air; a few pines spread their blue crowns in the foggy atmosphere. Over my head, ravens never cease flying, strung out in a black and endless line, hastening toward I know not what voracious feasts, and the wind brings the sad tinkling of bells hung on the necks of the scattered cows, grazing upon the niggardly grass of the heath.

As soon as I would see two little white horses and a coach with a yellow body descending the hillside in the clatter of old iron and bells, my heart would start beating faster. . . "There is perhaps a letter from her in that coach!" I would say to myself. And that old, dilapidated vehicle creaking on its springs appeared to me more splendid than a royal carriage, and the driver with his crush hat and his red face looked to me like a deliverer of some kind. How could Juliette write to me when she did not know where I was? But I was still hoping for a miracle! Then I would go back to the village, walking hastily, assuring myself by a succession of irrefutable arguments, that on that day I was going to get a long letter, in which Juliette would let me know of her coming to me, and I was reading in advance, her tender words, her passionate phrases, her repentance; on the paper I saw

traces of tears wet as yet, for all this while, I thought, Juliette was passing her time in crying. Alas! Nothing came from her. Sometimes there was a letter from Lirat, admirable, fatherly in its contents, which bored me. With heavy heart, feeling more than ever the crushing weight of loneliness, my mind excited by a thousand projects, one more foolish than the other, I would return to my dune. From this short-lived hope I would pass to keenest sorrow, and the day would pass in invoking Juliette, in calling her, in begging for her from the pale flowers on the sands, from the foam of the waves, from all this insensible nature about me which denied her to me and which ever revealed her indistinct image, marred by the kisses of everybody.

"Juliette! Juliette!"

One day, on the jetty, I met a young lady in the company of an old gentleman. Tall, slender, she looked pretty under her veil of white gauze which covered her face and whose ends, tied at the back of her grey felt hat, fluttered in the wind. Her graceful and supple movements resembled those of Juliette. Indeed in the way she carried her head, in the delicate curves of her waist line, in the way her arms fell, in the ruffling of her dress in the air, I recognized something of Juliette. I looked at her with emotion and two tears rolled down my cheeks. She walked to the end of the pier. I sat down on the parapet and, pensive and fascinated, followed the silhouette of the young lady. As she was moving away, I felt affected more and more. . . . Why had I not known her before I met the other one? I would have loved her perhaps! A young girl who has never felt the impure breath of man upon her, whose ears are chaste, whose lips have never known lewd kisses, what a joy it would be to love her, to love her as angels do!

The white veil was fluttering above her like the wings of a sea-gull. And suddenly she disappeared behind the lighthouse. At the bottom of the jetty the sea splashed back and forth like a child's cradle rocked by a nurse who hums a lullaby, and the sky was cloudless; it was stretched above the motionless surface of the water like a huge flowing curtain of light muslin.

The young lady was not long in coming back. She passed so near that her dress almost brushed against me. She was blond; I should have liked it better if she were dark as Juliette was. She walked away, left the jetty, took to the village road and pretty soon I saw only a white veil which seemed to say: "Good-bye, goodbye! Don't be sad, I shall come back."

In the evening I asked Mother Le Gannec about her.

"That's demoiselle Landudec," she replied, "a very excellent and well deserving girl, friend Mintié. The old gentleman is her father... They live in the big château on the Saint Jean road. You know which one I mean. . . . You have been there several times."

"How is it that I have never seen them?"

"Ah! Lord!... That's because the old man is always sick and the girl stays at home to take care of him, the poor thing! Undoubtedly he must have felt better today and she took him out for a walk."

"Hasn't she got a mother?"

"No. Her mother has been dead for quite some time."

"Are they rich?"

"Rich? Not so very! But they help everybody ... If you only went to mass on Sunday you would see the kind young lady."

That evening I remained to talk with Mother Le Gannec much longer. I saw the kindly lady again

several times on the jetty, and on those days the thought of Juliette was less oppressive. I wandered in the neighborhood of the château which looked to me as desolate as the Priory. Grass was sprouting in the courtyard, the lawns were not well kept, the alleys of the park were broken up by the heavy carts of nearby farmers. The grey stone façade, turned green by rain, was as gloomy as the large granite rocks that one saw on the waste land.... The following Sunday I went to mass, and I saw demoiselle Landudec praying among the peasants and fishermen. Kneeling on her prayer stool, her slim body bent like a primitive virgin, her head over a book, she prayed with fervor. Who knows? Perhaps she understood that I was unhappy and mentioned my name in her prayers? And while the priest was chanting his orison in a tremulous voice, while the nave of the church was being filled with the noise of wooden shoes beating against the slabs and with the whisper of lips in prayer, while the incense in the censer rose to the ceiling together with the shrill voices of the children in the choir, while the young lady prayed as Juliette would have done had she prayed at all, I was dreaming.... I was in the park, and the young lady approached, bathed in moonlight. She took my hand, and we walked on the lawns and in the shadow of rustling trees.

"Jean," she said to me, "you are suffering and I have come to you. I have asked God if I could love you. God permits. I love you!"

"You are too beautiful, too pure, too holy to love me! You must not love me!"

"I love you! Put your arm in mine, rest your head on my shoulder and let us walk together, always!"

"No, no! Is it possible for the lark to love the owl? Is it possible for the dove that flies in heaven to

love the toad which hides itself in the mud of stagnant waters?"

"You are not an owl, and you are not a toad, for I have chosen you! The love which God has permitted me to bear blots out all sin and assuages all sorrow. Come with me and I shall give you happiness."

"No, no! My heart is cankered, and my lips have drunk the poison which kills souls, the poison which damns angels like you; don't look at me so, for my eyes will defile you and you will be like Juliette!..."

The mass was over, the vision disappeared. There arose a noise of moved chairs and heavy steps in the church, and the children of the choir put out the tapers on the altar.... Still kneeling, the girl was praying. Of her face I could distinguish only a profile lost in the shadow of the white veil. She got up, after making the sign of the cross. I had to move my chair to let her pass. She passed... and I felt a real joy, as though in refusing the love which she offered me in thought I had just now fulfilled a great duty.

She occupied my mind for a week. I resumed my furious walks through the moor, on the strand, and I wished I could conquer my passion. While walking, driven by the wind, carried along by that peculiar exaltation occasioned by rain pelting the sea shore, I imagined all sorts of romantic conversations with demoiselle Landudec and nocturnal adventures which took place in enchanted and lunar places. Like the characters in an opera, we vied with each other in sublime thought, in heroic sacrifices, in wonderful devotion; under the spell of the passionate rhythms and stirring recurrences of the song of the elements, we extended the boundaries of human self-denial. A sobbing orchestra accompanied the anguish of our voices.

"I love you! I love you!"

"No, no! You must not love me!"

She, in a very long white gown, with a bewildered look and outstretched arms... I, gloomy, inexorable, the calves of my legs swelling under the violet silk tight garment, my hair disheveled by the wind.

"I love you! I love you!"

"No! No! You must not love me!"

And the violins emitted inaudible plaints, the wind instruments moaned, while the double basses and the dulcimers rumbled like tempest and peals of thunder.

Oh, the tragi-comedy of sorrow!

A curious thing! Demoiselle Landudec and Juliette became one; I no longer separated them, I confused them in my dreams, extravagant and melodramatic. Both were too pure for me.

"No! No! I am a leper, leave me alone!"

They passionately kissed my wounds, spoke of death and cried: "I love you! I love you!"

And vanquished, subdued, redeemed by love I fell at their feet. The old father, dying, spread his arms over us and blessed us, the three of us!

This trance did not last long; I soon found myself on the dune, face to face with Juliette.

There were no violins, no wind instruments any longer, only the howl of anguish and revolt, the cry of a captured stag craving the female of its species.

"Juliette! Juliette!"

One evening I returned home more despondent than ever, my mind obsessed with dismal projects, my arms and hands in some manner agitated by a mad desire to kill, to strangle. I would have liked to feel something alive writhing, rattling, dying under the pressure of my fingers. Mother Le Gannec was standing at the threshold, darning the never failing pair of stockings. She said to me:

"How late you are today, friend Mintié! I have prepared some nice sea-crab for you!"

"Leave me alone, you drivelling woman!" I shouted. "I don't want your sea-crab, I don't want anything, do you hear me?"

And sputtering angry words, I brutally made her step aside to let me pass. The poor kindly woman, stupefied by my action, lifted her arms to heaven and moaned.

"Ah! My Lord! Ah, Jesus!"

I went to my room and locked myself in. At first I rolled on the bed, smashed two chairs, beat my head against the wall. Then, I suddenly sat down to write a letter to Juliette, exalted, raging, full of terrible threats and humble entreaties; a letter in which I spoke of killing her, of forgiving her, in which I begged her to come to see me before I died, describing to her in tragic detail the cliff from which I was going to throw myself into the sea. I compared her to the lowest women in the brothel and two lines further I compared her to the Holy Virgin. More than twenty times I started this letter over again, excited, weeping, in turn delirious with rage and swooning with tenderness. Presently I heard a noise behind the door like the scratching of a mouse. I opened it. Mother Le Gannec was standing there, trembling and pale; she looked at me with her kind, bewildered eyes.

"What are you doing here?" I shouted. "Why do you spy on me? Go away!"

"Friend Mintié," muttered the sainted woman, "don't be angry. I can see that you are unhappy and I came to know if I can help you!"

"Well, suppose I am unhappy! Does that concern you? Here, take this letter to the post office and leave me in peace."

For four days I did not leave my room. Mother

Le Gannec came to make my bed and serve my meal. She was humble, timid, more attentive than ever, sighing:

"Ah! What a misfortune! My Lord, what a misfortune!"

I realized that I was not acting as I should; she had been so kind to me; I wanted to ask forgiveness for my rudeness. Her white coif, her black shawl, her sad figure of an afflicted mother touched me. But a sort of foolish pride threw a damper on this effusion. She walked near me, resigned, with an air of infinite motherly pity; from time to time she repeated:

"Ah! What a misfortune! My Lord! What a misfortune!"

The day drew to a close. While Mother La Gannec, after having mailed the letter, was sweeping the room, I sat at the window, my elbows resting on the ledge. The sun had disappeared behind the horizon line, leaving of its dazzling glory only a reddish transparency on the sky, and the sea, grown dark, dull, no longer reflecting light, assumed a sad hue. Night came, silent and slow, and the air was so calm that one could hear the rhythmic noise of oars striking the water of the wharf and the distant creaking of halliards on the masts tops. The beacon light was turned on, its red light turning in space like some irrational astral body.... And I felt very unhappy!

Juliette did not answer me!... Juliette would not come!... My letter, no doubt, had frightened her. She had recalled furious, savage, strangling scenes. She was afraid and would not come! And besides, were there not races, banquets, dinners, a line of impatient men at her door, waiting for her, claiming her, men who had paid in advance for the promised night? Why should she come, after all? There was no Casino on this desolate beach; in this God-forsaken corner of

the coast there was no one to whom she could sell herself.

As for me, she had taken all my money, my brains, my honor, my future, everything! What more could I give her? Nothing. Why then should she come? If I had only told her that I had ten thousand francs left she would have come running. But to what purpose? Ah! Let her not come! My anger subsided, self-disgust replaced it, a frightful disgust! How could it be possible that a man who was not bad, whose past aspirations lacked neither nobility of character nor ardor, should fall so low, in such a short time, into a mire so deep that no human force could lift him out of it! . . .

What I now suffered from was not so much my own follies, my own disgrace and crimes as the misery which I had caused those around me. Old Marie!. . . Old Felix! . . . Oh, the poor couple! Where were they now? What were they doing? Did they have anything to eat, at least? Had I not compelled them to beg their bread when I expelled them — so old, so kind, so confiding, more feeble and desolate than homeless dogs! I saw them bent over their staffs, horribly thin, coughing, harassed, spending nights in chance lodgings. And the sainted Mother Le Gannec who took care of me as a mother her child, who lulled me to sleep with her warm caresses like those bestowed on little ones! Instead of kneeling before her, of thanking her, did I not treat her brutally, did I not almost beat her! Ah, no! Let her not come! Let her not come!

Mother Le Gannec lit the lamp, and I was about to close the window when I heard the tinkling of small bells upon the road, then the trundling of a carriage. I mechanically looked out. Indeed a carriage had ascended the steep hill of this place, it was a sort of

stage which appeared very high and loaded with trunks. A fisherman passed by. The postman asked him:

"Will you please tell us where the house of Madame Le Gannec is?" "It is in front of you," answered the fisherman, who indicated the house with a motion of hand and continued on his way.

I grew very pale . . . and I saw by the light of the lantern a small gloved hand resting on the handle of the stage door.

"Juliette! Juliette!" I shouted like a madman. "Mother Le Gannec, it's Juliette! . . . Quick, quick . . . it's Juliette!"

Running, tumbling down the stairway, I dashed to the street: "Juliette! My Juliette!"

Arms embraced me, lips pressed against my cheek, a voice breathed in my ears:

"Jean! My dear little Jean!"

And I swooned into the arms of Juliette.

It did not take me long to regain my senses, however. They put me to bed and Juliette, bent over me, embraced me, crying:

"Ah! Poor little thing. How you frightened me! How pale you still are! Is it all over, tell me? Speak to me, my Jean!"

I did nothing but look at her. It seemed as though my whole being, inert and rigid, smitten by a powerful blow, by some great suffering or happiness — I did not know which — had brought back and crowded into my glance all the life forces leaving me, dripping from my limbs, my veins, my heart, my brains. . . . I was looking at her! She was still beautiful, a little paler than in the past, but on the whole the same as ever, with her beautiful, sweet eyes, her lovely mouth, her deliciously childish voice. In her countenance, her gestures, the movements of her body, her words I

wanted to find some sorrowful traces of her unknown existence, some blemish, some evidence of depravity, something new and more withered. But no, she was paler, and that was all. And I burst into tears.

"Sit still, I want to look at you more, my little Juliette!"

She drank in my tears and wept, holding me in a close embrace.

"My Jean! Ah, my adored Jean!"

Mother Le Gannec rapped at the door of the room. She did not speak to Juliette, pretending not to see her.

"What shall I do with the trunks, friend Mintié?" she asked.

"Have some one bring them up here, Mother Le Gannec."

"You could not bring them all up here," the old woman harshly replied.

"Have you got many of them, dearie?"

"Many? Why no! There are only six. These people are stupid!"

"Well, Mother Le Gannec," I said, "keep them downstairs tonight. We shall see tomorrow."

I got up, while Juliette examined the room, occasionally exclaiming:

"Why, it's so nice here! There's a lot of fun here, my dear. And you have a bed, too, a real bed. And I thought they slept in wardrobes in Brittany! Ah! What is that? Don't stir, Jean, don't stir."

From the mantlepiece she took a large shell and put it to her ear.

"Wait!" she said with disappointment. "Wait now, it does not make that sh-sh-sh sound. Why is that?"

She suddenly rushed into my arms and covered me with kisses.

"Ah! your beard! You are growing whiskers, you

villain! Ah how long your hair is! And how thin you are! And I, have I changed much! Am I still beautiful?"

She placed her arms around my neck and rested her head on my shoulder:

"Tell me what you have been doing here, how you have spent your time, what you have been thinking about. Tell it all to your little wifie. And don't tell lies. Tell her everything, everything."

Then I described my furious walks, my prostrations on the dune, my sobbing, the fact that I had been seeing her everywhere, calling her like a madman in the wind, in the tempest.

"Poor little thing!" she sighed. "And you probably have not even a raincoat."

"And you? you, my Juliette? Did you ever think of me?"

"Ah! When I found you gone from the house I thought I would die. Celestine told me that a man had come to take you away! Still I waited. . . . He will come, he will come. . . . But you did not come back. The next morning I ran to Lirat! Oh, if you only knew how he received me! . . how he treated me! And I asked everybody: 'Do you know where Jean is?' And no one could answer me. Oh, you naughty boy! To leave me like that. . . without a word! Don't you love me any more? Then, you understand, I wanted to forget myself. I was suffering too much."

Her words had a sharp, curt ring in them:

"As for Lirat, you may rest assured, my dear, I'll get even with him. You'll see! It'll be a farce! What a mean person your friend Lirat is! But you'll see."

One thing tormented me: how many days or weeks would Juliette stay with me? She had brought six trunks with her; hence she intended to remain at

Ploch for a month at least, — perhaps longer. Together with the great anticipated joy of possessing her without fear or obstacle, there mingled a keen uneasiness. I had no money, and I knew Juliette too well not to realize that she would not resign herself to a life like mine, and I foresaw expenditures which I was not in a position to make. What was to be done? Not having enough courage to ask her directly, I answered:

"We have plenty of time to think of it, my dear. In about three months from now when we shall go back to Paris.

"Three months! Why no, my poor little thing, I leave in a week. I am so sorry."

"Stay here, my little Juliette, I implore you, stay here altogether. Stay longer! A fortnight!"

"It is impossible, really. Oh, don't be sad, my dear! Don't cry! If you cry I won't tell you something very nice."

She became more affectionate, nestled and resumed:

"Listen, my dear. I have only one thought, and that is to live with you! We shall leave Paris, we shall move into a small house, hidden so well, you see, that no one will know that we are living. All we need is an income of twenty thousand francs."

"Where do you expect me to get that much now?" I exclaimed discouraged.

"Now, listen to me," continued Juliette. "We need only twenty thousand francs. Well, I have figured it all out! In six months we shall have it.

Juliette looked at me with a mysterious air and repeated:

"We shall have it!"

"Please don't talk like that, my dear. You don't know how you hurt me."

Juliette raised her voice, the wrinkle on her forehead grew rigid.

"Then you want me always to belong to others?"

"Oh! keep still, Juliette! Keep still! Never talk to me like that, never!"

"You are so funny! Come now, be nice and embrace me!"

The next morning, while dressing in the midst of opened trunks and scattered dresses, very much disconcerted by the absence of her chamber maid, she made all sorts of plans for the day. She wanted to take a walk on the jetty, to visit the lighthouse, to fish, to walk to the dune and sit down on the spot where I had cried so much. She said she enjoyed watching the pretty Breton girls in braided and embroidered dresses, like those in the theatre, drinking fresh milk on the farms!

"Are there any boats here?"

"Yes."

"Lot of them?"

"Certainly."

"Ah! What a chance. I like boats so much!"

Then she gave me news of Paris. Gabrielle no longer lived with Robert. Malterre was married. Jesselin was on a trip. He had had several duels. And gossip about everybody. All this bad odor of Paris brought back my melancholy and bitter memories. Seeing me sad, she interrupted herself and embraced me, assuming an air of distress:

"Ah! Perhaps you suppose I like this life!" she said plaintively, "and that I only think of amusing myself, of flirting. If you only knew! There are certain things that I can't tell you. But if you knew what a torture it is to me! You think you are unhappy! How about me? Why, if I did not have the hope of living

with my Jean I would kill myself, so often do I feel disgusted with life."

And, dreaming and wheedling, she would revert to the subject of farming, of hidden paths covered with verdure, of the peace and sweetness of a retired life amid flowers, domestic animals and love. Ah! devoted, humble, eternal love, love that was to brighten our life like the dazzling sun!

We went out after the breakfast which Mother Le Gannec sullenly served us, without once opening her mouth. We were hardly out, when the wind freshened; it disheveled Juliette's hair. She wanted to return to the house.

"Ah! The wind, dear! I can't stand the wind. It spoils my hair and makes me sick."

She was bored all day and our kisses could not dispel the feeling of emptiness. Just as in the past, in my study, she spread a napkin on her dress, placed a few small nail brushes and files on the napkin, and gravely began to polish her nails. I suffered cruelly, and the vision of the old man at the window obsessed me.

The next day Juliette announced that she had to leave that very evening.

"Ah! What a misfortune, my dear! I have forgotten! Quick, quick, get me a carriage. Oh! what a misfortune!"

I made no effort to detain her. Sunk in my chair motionless, gloomy, my head buried in my hands, I sat throughout the preparations for her departure without uttering a single word or making a single request. Juliette went out, returned, folding her gowns, arranging her dressing-case, locking her trunks; I heard nothing, saw nothing, knew nothing. Men came in; their heavy steps caused the floor to

creak. I understood that they were taking the trunks away. Juliette sat on my lap.

"My poor little dear," she cried, "you suffer because I leave so soon. You should not feel hurt. . . be sensible. Besides, I'll come back shortly and stay a long time. Don't act so. I'll come back. I promise you. I'll bring Spy along. I'll also bring a horse to ride on, yes? You'll see how well your little wifie rides on horseback. Now embrace me, my Jean! Why don't you embrace me? Come on, Jean! Good bye! I adore you! Good bye!"

It was growing dark when Mother Le Gannec came into my bedroom. She lit the lamp and gently approached.

"Friend Mintié! Friend Mintié!"

I lifted my eyes; she was so sad, there breathed such merciful pity from her that I threw myself into her arms.

"Ah! Mother Le Gannec! Mother Le Gannec!" I sobbed. "That is what is killing me!"

Mother Lè Gannec murmured:

"Friend Mintié, why don't you pray to the merciful Lord? That will relieve you."

CHAPTER X

IT is a week since I have been able to sleep. There is a hood of red hot iron upon my head. My blood thickens, one might say that my dilated arteries were bursting, and I have the sensation of tongues of fire licking my loins. Whatever human qualities there still remained in me, what little shame, remorse, self-respect and vague hopes buried under the heap of filth have been left in me by moral suffering, the little that has still held me bound by a thread, be it ever so weak, to thinking creatures — all this has now been destroyed by the madness of a frenzied brute. No longer do I entertain thoughts of Good, Truth, Justice, the inflexible laws of nature. I am no longer conscious of the sexual aversion which exists between the various species in the animal kingdom, keeping the world in constant harmony: everything is in a whirl, everything is confused into one tremendous and sterile carnal essence and, in the delirium of my senses, I rave only of unnatural embraces. Not only does the image of prostituted Juliette no longer torment me, but on the contrary it excites my passions! And in my mind I seek, I cling to her, I try to fix her in my memory by ineffaceable marks, I confound her with things, with beasts, with monstrous creatures and I myself lead her to criminal debauchery, spurred on by burning pains. Juliette is no longer the only image that tempts and haunts me. Gabrielle, the Rabineau woman, Mother Le Gannec, Demoiselle Landudec, pass before my eyes in wanton postures. Neither virtue, nor goodness, nor unhappiness, nor sacred old age holds me back, and for the scene of these fright-

ful frenzies I purposely choose holy and hallowed places, altars in churches, tombs at the cemeteries. I no longer suffer in my soul; I suffer only in my flesh. My soul died in Juliette's last kiss, and now I am nothing but a form of foul, sensuous flesh, into which demons have been furiously at work pouring streams of molten, seething metal. Oh! I could never have forseen such castigation!

The other day I met a fisherwoman on the strand. She was black, dirty, foul-smelling, like a heap of putrified sea wrack. I made advances to her with silly gestures. And suddenly I fled, for I felt a diabolic temptation to rush upon her and throw her down amid the pebbles and small pools of water. I roamed and tramped across the country with dilated nostrils, taking in, like a harrier, the odor of sex. . . . One night, with burning throat, driven mad by abominable visions, I found my way into the crooked alleys of the village and rapped at the door of a loose woman. And I went into this den. But as soon as I felt the unknown contact I uttered a cry of rage; I wanted to leave; she held me back.

"Let me go!" I shouted.

"Why are you going away?"

"Let me go!"

"Stay here. I'll love you. I often followed you on the beach. I often roamed about the house where you are staying. I wanted you. Stay here!"

"Let me go, I tell you! You don't know how disgusting you are to me!"

And when she hung on my neck, I struck her. She groaned.

"Ah! My God! He is mad!"

Mad! Yes, I am mad! I have looked at myself in the mirror and I am afraid of my own image. My distended eyes shine from the midst of their orbits which

are hollow; my bones protrude from under the yellow skin; my mouth is pale, trembling, hanging like the mouths of lascivious old men. My gestures are erratic, and my fingers, constantly agitated by nervous shocks, crack, seeking a prey in the air.

Mad! Yes, I am mad! Whenever Mother Le Gannec is moving about me, when I hear her slippers dragging on the floor, when her dress brushes against me, criminal notions come and take possession of me; they pursue me and I cry:

"Go away, Mother Le Gannec, go away."

Mad! Yes, I am mad! Often at night I stand for hours at the door of her room, my hand upon the knob, ready to plunge into the darkness of the room. I don't know what is holding me back. Fear, no doubt, for I say to myself: "She will struggle, cry, call for help and I shall be compelled to kill her!" Once, alarmed by the noise, she got up, barelegged; she was dumbfounded for a moment, upon beholding me.

"What is the matter! It's you, friend Mintié? What are you doing here? Are you ill?"

I stammered some incoherent words and went upstairs to my room.

Ah! Let them drive me out, beat me, with forks, stakes, scythes. Is it possible that men will not come in here in a moment, rush upon me, gag and drag me into the eternal night of the dungeon?

I must go away! I must find Juliette again! I must vent this accursed madness upon her!

When dawn came I went downstairs and said to Mother Le Gannec: "I must leave! Let me have some money. I shall pay it back to you later. Let me have some money. I must leave!"

CHAPTER XI

JULIETTE had chosen a room for me on the second floor of a furnished house in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré near the Rue de Balzac. The furniture of the room was rickety, the tapestry worn, the drawers creaked when opened, the pungent odor of decaying wood and accumulated dust filled the window curtains and bedstead hangings; but by placing knick-knacks here and there, she succeeded in imparting an air of intimacy to this banal, cold place, where so many unknown lives had been spent without a trace being left behind. Juliette reserved to herself the task of arranging my things in the hanging-press which she filled with bunches of fragrant flowers.

"You see, my dear, here are your socks, and there are your night shirts. I put your neckties in the drawer; your handkerchiefs are there. I hope your little wifie has put everything in order. And every day I'll bring you a sweet-smelling flower. Now don't be sad. Tell yourself that I love you, that I love no one but you, that I shall come often. Oh, I have forgotten a few things! Well, I'll send them to you with Celestine, together with my pictures in the beautiful red plush frames. Don't feel lonesome, my poor, little thing! You know, if I am not here at half-past twelve tonight don't wait for me. Go to bed. Sleep well. Promise me?"

And casting a last glance about the room, she left.

Indeed, Juliette came every day, while going to the Bois and on her way home before dinner. She never remained more than two minutes at a time. Excited, impelled by a feverish desire to be outside, she would

stay long enough to embrace me and to open the drawers to see whether my things were in order.

"Well I am going. Don't be sad. I see you have been crying. That is not nice at all! Why cause me aggravation?'

"Juliette! Will I see you tonight? Oh! please, tonight!"

"Tonight?"

She reflected for a minute.

"Tonight, yes, my dear! But still do not wait for me too long. Go to bed. Sleep well. Above all, don't cry. You drive me to despair! Really, I don't know what to do with you!"

And so I lived here, stretched out on the sofa, never going out, counting the minutes which slowly, slowly, drop by drop, vanished into the eternity of waiting.

The frenzied excitement of my senses was succeeded by a period of great depression. I spent whole afternoons apathetically, without stirring, my body lifeless, my limbs hanging, my brains in a state of torpor, like the morrow of a day of drunkenness. My life resembled a heavy slumber disturbed by painful dreams, interrupted by sudden awakenings even more painful than the dreams; and in the annihilation of my will power, in the blotting out of my intellect, I again felt, but more keenly than ever, the horror of my moral decay. In addition, Juliette's life caused me perpetual anguish. As in the past, on the dune of Ploch, I could not dismiss from my mind the loathsome vision which grew, intensified and assumed even more cruel forms. . . . To lose a person whom you love, a person who has been the source of all your joys, the memory of whom is associated with happiness only, is a heart-rending sorrow. But where there is sorrow there is also consolation, and suffering is eventually put to sleep, lulled in some way by its own tenderness. But here I

was losing Juliette, losing her daily, every hour, every minute; and with this chain of successive deaths, with this process of impenitent dying, I could only associate memories of torture and disgrace.

No matter how eagerly I searched in the stirred-up depths of our two hearts for a flower bud, for a tiny blossom whose fragrance it would have been so sweet to inhale, I could not find it. And yet I could not conceive anything dissociated from Juliette. All my thoughts had Juliette for their starting point and for their final goal, and the more she escaped me the more fiercely obdurate I grew in my absurd desire to win her back. I had no hope at all that she would ever stop, carried away as she was by this life of evil pleasure; yet, in spite of myself, in spite of her, I was planning for a better future. I said to myself: "It is impossible that some day disgust will not seize her, that some day sorrow will not awaken remorse and pity in her heart. Then she will return to me. Then we will move into a plain workman's house and I shall work like a galley-slave. I'll enter journalism, I'll publish novels, I'll ask for a job as a plain copyist." Alas! I forced myself to believe all this so as to accentuate the state of misery into which I had fallen. With the proceeds from the sale of two sketches by Lirat, of a few jewels I still had, of my books, I had realized a sum of four thousand francs, which I was saving like a treasure for that chimeric eventuality.

One day when Juliette was pensive and tenderer than usual, I ventured to lay my project before her. She clasped her hands.

"Yes! Yes! Ah! Won't that be nice! A little bit of an apartment, a tiny one. I'll do the housekeeping, I'll have pretty bonnets, a pretty apron! But with you it'll be impossible! What a pity! It's impossible!"

"Why is it impossible?"

"Because you won't work and we'll starve. That's your nature! Did you work at Ploch. Are you working now? Why, you have never worked!"

"How can I? Don't you know that the thought of you never leaves me for a moment? It is the uncertainty of your life, it is the cruel anguish of everything I feel, of everything I suspect about you that gnaws at my heart, devours me, sucks my brains! When you are not here, I don't know where you are! And still I am always with you wherever you are! Ah! if you only wished! To know that you are near me, loving and tranquil, far from everything that besmirches, from everything that torments. Why, I could then have the strength of a God in me! Money! Money! Why, I'll make it for you by the shovelful, by the cartful! Ah! Juliette if you only wished. . . ."

She looked at me, excited by the great noise of gold which my words caused to ring in her ears.

"Well! Make it right away, dearie. Yes, make a lot of it, piles of it! And don't think about those vile things which make you suffer! Men are so funny! They don't want to understand anything!"

Tenderly, she sat down on my lap.

"Why, I adore you, my dear little thing! Why, I detest the others and I give them nothing of myself, do you hear, nothing. I am very unhappy!"

With tear-filled eyes, she tried to nestle near me, repeating: "Yes very, very unhappy!"

I was seized with fear and pity.

"Ah! He thinks it is a pleasure!" she cried sobbing, "he thinks so! But if I did not have my Jean to console me, my Jean to lull me to sleep, my Jean to give me courage, I could not stand it any longer. I could not stand it any longer. . . . I would rather die."

Suddenly, changing the subject, and with a voice in which I seeemd to hear a plaint of regret:

"First of all, you need money for that, — for the little apartment, I mean. . . and you haven't got it!"

"Why yes, yes, my dear," I exclaimed triumphantly, "I have some money. We have enough to live on for two months, three months while I make my fortune!"

"You have money? Let me see it."

I showed her four one thousand franc bills. Juliette greedily snatched them one after another, counted them, examined them. Her eyes shone, surprised and delighted.

"Four thousand francs, dear! you really have four thousand francs! Why, you are rich! Well, well!"

She hung on my neck, caressed me.

"Well now," she resumed, "since you are so rich, I should like to have a little traveling dressing case that I saw at the Rue de Paix. You will buy it for me, won't you, dearie?"

I felt a tug at my heart so painful that I nearly fell to the floor, and a well of tears blinded me. Still I had the courage to ask:

"How much does your dressing case cost?"

"Two thousand francs, my dear."

"All right! Take two thousand francs out of that. You'll buy it yourself."

Juliette kissed my forehead, took the two bills which she quickly hid in her coat pocket, and her gaze fixed on the two bills which still remained and for which she no doubt regretted she had not asked, she said:

"Really? Do you want me to? Ah! that's nice! That will give me a chance to come to see you with my new dressing case, if you should return to Ploch."

When she was gone, I abandoned myself to an outburst of anger against her, above all against myself, and when the anger subsided I suddenly realized to my astonishment that I no longer suffered. Yes, I

breathed more freely, I was able to stretch out my arms with greater vigor, I felt a new buoyancy in my limbs; at last, one might say, some one had removed the crushing weight which for so long a time I had borne on my shoulders. I experienced a keen joy in moving my limbs, in exercising my muscles and joints, in setting my nerves into vibration, when it thus came upon me one morning, in a leap from my bed. Was I not really awakening from a slumber as deep as death? Was I not recovering from a sort of catalepsy, in which my whole being, sunk in torpor, had known the horrible nightmare of non-existence? I was like one buried who finds the light of day again, like one famished who is given a piece of bread, like one sentenced to death who receives his pardon. . . . I went to the window and looked out into the street. The slanting rays of the sun were flooding the houses in front of me with a golden mist; on the sidewalk people were hurriedly passing, preoccupied, with a happy gait; carriages joyously crossed each other's path. The hustle and bustle and noise of life intoxicated, stirred, carried me away, and I cried out:

"I don't love you any more! I don't love you any more!"

In the space of a second I had a very clear vision of a new life of work and happiness. I was to cleanse myself of this filth, to seize my interrupted dreams; not only did I want to redeem my honor, but I wanted also to achieve a glory so great, so undisputed, so universal, that Juliette would burst with spite for having lost a man like me. I already saw myself perpetuated in bronze and marble by posterity, placed upon columns and symbolic pedestals, filling the centuries to come with my immortalized image. And what gave me particular pleasure was the thought that Juliette

would not share a particle of this glory, and that I pitilessly pushed her off my lofty plane entirely.

I went down, and for the first time in two years felt a delicious pleasure in being on the street. I walked fast, with supple movements, a victorious gait, interested in the simplest things about me which seemed so new. And I asked myself with amazement how in the world I could have been unhappy so long, why my eyes had not opened to the truth much sooner than they did. . . . Ah, that despicable Juliette! How she must have laughed at my submission, my blindness, my pitifulness, my inconceivable folly! No doubt, she told her casual lovers of my idiotic grief. But I was going to have my revenge and it would be terrible! Juliette would soon lie prostrate at my feet begging my pardon.

"No, no, you miserable creature, never! . . When I cried, did you comfort me? . . . Did you spare me a single suffering, a single one? Did you ever for a moment consent to share my misery, to live my life with me? You don't deserve to share my glory. No. . . go!"

And to show my absolute contempt for her, I would throw millions in her face.

"Here are your millions! You said you wanted millions? Here are some more!"

Juliette would wring her arms in despair.

"Have mercy, Jean! Have pity on me! I don't want your money! What I want is to live in obscurity and humbly in your shadow, happy if a single ray of light surrounding you will some day come to rest upon your poor Juliette. Have pity on me!"

"Did you have pity on me when I asked for it! No! Women like you should be killed with blows of gold. Here! Have some more! Here! Some more still!"

I was walking with long strides, talking aloud, moving my hands as if throwing millions into space.

"Here, wretch, here!"

Nevertheless, my insusceptibility to everything else when preoccupied with the thought of Juliette was not so complete as to preclude my getting uneasy at the sight of any woman, and scrutinizing with an impatient glance the inside of the carriages which endlessly passed by on the street. On the boulevard my assurance left me, and anguish again seized my whole being. I felt an unbearable burden upon my shoulders, and the devouring beast driven off but a moment ago, rushed on me more ferociously than ever, sinking its fangs into my flesh deeper than ever. It was enough for me to see the theatres, the restaurants, those evil places full of the mystery of Juliette's life, to make me feel this. The theatres were saying to me: "She was here that night; while you were moaning, calling her, waiting for her — she was promenading in her stage box, with flowers on her bosom, happy, without the slightest thought of you." The restaurants were saying: "That night your Juliette was here. . . With eyes drunk with lust she was rolling on our broken sofas, and men who smelled of wine and cigars possessed her." And all the agile, handsome young men I met on the street seemed to say to me: "We know your Juliette. Does she give you any of the money she charges us?" Every house, every object, every manifestation of life cried with a frightful chuckle: "Juliette! Juliette!" The sight of roses at the florist's was painful, and I felt rage boil within me each time I looked at the shop windows with their display of inviting things. It seemed to me that Paris was spending all its power, using all its seduction, to rob me of Juliette, and I wished to see it perish in some catastrophe; I regretted that the rigorous days of the

Commune were over, when one could pour petroleum and scatter death upon the streets! I returned home.

"Did anyone call?" I asked the caretaker.

"No, Monsieur Mintié."

"No letters either?"

"No, Monsieur Mintié."

"Are you sure nobody went up to my room while I was away?"

"The key was not touched."

I scribbled the following words on my card: "I want to see you."

"Take this over to the Rue de Balzac."

I waited in the street, impatient, nervous; the caretaker was not long in returning.

"The maid told me that Madame had not yet come back."

It was seven o'clock. I went to my room and stretched out on the sofa.

"She won't come. Where is she? What is she doing?"

I did not light the candles. The window, illuminated by the street, shone in the room with a dark glimmer, reflected a yellow shine upon the ceiling, where appeared the trembling shadow of the curtains. And the hours passed, slow and endless, so endless and so slow that one might say the flow of time had suddenly stopped.

"She won't come!"

From the street, the intermittent noise of vehicles reached me; the buses rolled heavily, the closed carriages passed by lightly and rapidly. When one of them passed close to the sidewalk or slowed down I would rush to the window, which I had left half-open, to look into the street. . . . No one alighted.

"She won't come!"

And while saying to myself: "She won't come," I

hoped that Juliette would be in shortly. Oh, how many times I had rolled on the sofa, crying: "She won't come!" And Juliette always came. Always at the moment when I most despaired, I heard a carriage stop, then steps on the stairway, a creaking noise in the hallway, and Juliette would appear smiling, adorned with plumes, filling the room with a strong odor of perfume and the rustling of silk in motion.

"Come on, get your hat, my dear."

Irritated by her smile, by her dress, by the perfume, exasperated by the long waiting, I used to upbraid her severely:

"Where have you been? In what joints have you been? Yes, tell me, in what joints?"

"Ah! You are trying to make a scene. Well, thanks! I am leaving. Good night! And here I have taken all the pains in the world to snatch a moment to look you up!"

Then pointing my finger to the door, my muscles contracted, I would burst out:

"Well, go ahead! Go to the devil! And never come back again, never!"

With the door scarcely shut behind Juliette, I would run after her.

"Juliette! Come back, please! Juliette! Wait. . . . I am going with you."

She would still be descending the stairs, without turning her head. I would catch up with her.

Near her, near this dress, these plumes, these flowers, these jewels, fury would again seize me:

"Come right up with me or I'll crack your head against these steps!"

And when in the room I would throw myself at her feet.

"Ah, my little Juliette, I am wrong, I know I am wrong. But I suffer so much! Have pity on me! If

you only knew in what a hell I am living! If you could only tear my breast open and see what is going on in my heart! Juliette! Oh, I can't, I can't go on living like this any more! Even a beast would have pity on me. Yes, a wretched beast would have pity on me!"

I would press her arms, cling to her dress.

"My Juliette! I have not killed you, though I have a perfect right to, I swear. I have not killed you! You should have given an account of yourself. I must make inhuman efforts to control myself, for you don't know what terrible and vengeful things a man who suffers and is lonely can conceive. I have not killed you! I have been hoping! — I am still hoping! Come back to me. I'll forget everything, I'll erase everything from my memory, my sorrow and my shame. . . . You will be to me the purest, the most radiant of virgins. We'll go away, far, far away from here. Wherever you wish. I shall marry you! Don't you want me to? Do you think I am telling you this in order to have you with me again? Swear to me that you will change your mode of life and I'll kill myself here in front of you! Listen, I have sacrificed everything for you! I am not talking of my fortune, but of what was formerly the pride of my life, my manly honor, my dream of an artist, all this I have given up for you, without the least regret. You should make some sacrifice for me in turn. And pray, what is it I ask of you? Nothing. . . except the gladness of being honest and good. To devote, to consecrate oneself to something, why that's so grand, so noble! Oh, if you only knew the infinite pleasure of sacrifice? Look now. . Malterre is rich. He is a good fellow, better than the others, he loved you! I'll go to him, I'll say to him: 'You alone can save Juliette, you alone can save Juliette, you alone can bring her back from the life she is living. Go back

to her, and don't be afraid of me. I am going out of her life.' Do you want me to do that?"

Juliette would look at me, greatly astonished. An uneasy smile would play on her lips. She would murmur:

"Come, my dear, you say silly things. Don't cry, come!"

While going out, I would continue to lament: "A beast would have pity on me! Yes, a beast!"

At other times, she would send Celestine for me, and I would find her in bed, cold, sad and tired. I could see that some one had been there just a moment ago, some one who had just left; I could see it in everything that surrounded me — in the bed just made, in the toilette articles arranged with overscrupulous care, in all the carefully removed traces which in my imagination reappeared again in all their hidden and sorrowful reality. I would linger in the dressing room, rummage among the drawers, examine objects, even lower myself to a shameful scrutiny of her personal belongings. . . . Juliette would call me:

"Come over here, my dear! What are you doing there?"

Oh! If I could only reconstruct his image, find the least trace of that man! I inhaled the air, inflated my nostrils, hoping to come upon the strong male scent, and it seemed to me that the shadow of a mighty torso spread itself over the hangings, that I distinguished huge, athletic arms, quivering thighs with bulging muscles.

"Are you coming?" Juliette would repeat.

On those nights Juliette would talk of nothing but the soul, the sky, the birds, telling me that she was in need of an ideal, of celestial dreams. Huddled in my arms, chaste as a child, she would say, with a sigh:

"Oh, how nice it is to sit like this! Tell me some-

thing beautiful, my Jean, some such thing as one reads about in poetry. I love your voice so much; it is so musical . . . speak to me long. You are so good, you comfort me so well! I would like to live all my life like this, always in your arms, without stirring, listening to you! Do you know what else I would like to have? Ah, I am dreaming of it all the time! I would like to have a nice little baby girl who should be like a cherub, all pink and blond! I would nurse her myself and you would sing her some pretty little songs to put her to sleep! My Jean, when I am dead you will find in my jewelry case a little pink writing book with gold ornaments. That's for you. Take it. There I have written down my thoughts, and you'll see whether I loved you or not! You'll see! Ah! Tomorrow one must get up again, go out . . . how annoying! Rock me, speak to me, tell me that you love my soul . . . my soul! . . ."

And she would fall asleep, and in her sleep look so white, so pure, that the bed curtains would seem like wings attached to her.

Night came on, the suburb grew quiet. From afar, belated carriages were returning, and on the sidewalk two policemen paced with heavy, dragging strides, keeping in step. . . . Several times the door of the furnished house opened and closed; I heard some creaky noise, the rustling of a woman's dress, whispering voices in the hallway. But it was not Juliette. The silent house seemed to have been asleep a long while. I left the sofa, lit my lamp, looked at the clock; it was three o'clock.

"She won't come! Now it's all over. She won't come!"

I stood at the window. The street was deserted, the dark sky hung over the houses like a leaden lid. Over yonder in the direction of Boulevard Haussman

large vehicles were coming down hill, shaking the night with their loud jolting. . . . A rat darted from one sidewalk to the other and disappeared into a hole in the gutter. . . . I saw a homeless dog with hanging head and tail between its hind legs passing, stopping at the doors, smelling the gutter, dolefully walking away.

I shook with fever, my brain was inflamed, my hands were moist and again I felt a stifling sensation in my chest.

"She won't come! Where is she? Did she go back to her house? Where, in what filthy hole of this great impure night is she wallowing?"

What made me particularly angry was that she did not let me know ahead of time. She had received my card. She knew she was not coming. And she did not send me a single word! I had cried, implored, begged her on my knees . . . and not a word from her! How many tears, how much blood must one shed to soften that heart of flint? How could she run after pleasure with her ears still full of the echoes of my sobs, her mouth still moist with my entreating kisses? The most wretched women, the most detestable creatures at some time or other call a temporary halt to their life of dissipation and prey; there are moments when they permit the sun to penetrate their chilled hearts, when turning their eyes to heaven they pray for love that pardons and redeems! But Juliette . . . never! Something more insensible than fate, something more relentless than death was driving her, was eternally drawing and spurring her on without respite, without pause, from impure to criminal love, from that which dishonors to that which kills! The more days passed, the more marks of infamy debauchery left on her. With her passion, formerly so normal and healthy, were now mingled a depraved in-

quisitiveness and that savage unsatiableness, that overstimulation of irrepressible lust which comes as result of excessive and sterile pleasures. Except on the nights when exhaustion invested the sordid reality of her existence with unexpected forms of the purest ideal, one could see upon her the imprints of a thousand different and refined corruptions, of a thousand grotesque perversions practiced upon her by those palled by vice and age. Words and cries often escaped her which suddenly lit up her whole life and opened up vistas of frenzied sensuality, and although she would thereby communicate to me the consuming passion of her depravity, although I myself relished in all this a sort of infernal criminal voluptuousness, I could not look at Juliette without a shudder! . . . And when leaving her embrace, ashamed and disgusted, I felt the need, often experienced by reprobates, of looking at tranquil, restful sights, and I envied, — oh, with what keen regret! — the superior beings who had made purity and virtue the inflexible laws of their life! . . . I dreamed of convents where one spent one's life in prayer, of hospitals where one devoted oneself to others. . . . I was seized with a mad desire to enter the disreputable joints and preach the gospel to the unfortunate people who wallow in vice there, never hearing a single word of kindness; I promised myself to follow the prostitutes at night, into the shadow of public squares, to console them, to speak to them of virtue with such passionate earnestness, in accents so touching that they would be moved, would burst into tears and would say to me: "Yes, save us. . . ." I liked to spend hours in the Monceau park, watching the children play, discovering a paradise of goodness in the glances of young mothers; I was moved to reconstruct their lives so remote from my own; to live through, while near them, their sacred joys forever

lost to me. . . . On Sundays I used to loiter at the railway stations where I mingled with the merry crowds, among petty officials and workingmen leaving town with their families to get a little fresh air for their affected lungs, to gather a little strength to be able to withstand the fatigue of their work during the week. I followed the steps of some laborer whose face interested me; I would have liked to possess his bent back, his deformed hands turned brown through hard work, his stiff walk, his trusting eyes of a house dog. . . . Alas! . . I would have liked to have everything I did not have, to be everybody that I was not! . . . These wanderings which rendered the realization of my downfall even more painful, did me some good, however, and I used to come home each time with all sorts of courageous resolutions. . . . But in the evening I would see Juliette again, and Juliette was to me the oblivion of all honor and all duty.

Above the houses the sky was brightened by a feeble light announcing the approaching dawn, and at the end of the street, in the shadow, I noticed two glaring points, the two lights of a carriage, vacillating, swerving, approaching, which resembled two errant gas lamps. . . . Hope revived in me for a moment. . . the carriage came nearer, dancing on the pavement, the lights grew larger, the rattling quickened. . . . I thought I recognized the familiar trundling of Juliette's brougham! . . . But no! . . . Suddenly the carriage turned to the left and disappeared. . . . Within an hour it would already be day!

"She won't come! . . . This time it is all over, she won't come!"

I closed the window, lay down again on the sofa, blood surging in my temples, all my members aching. . . . . In vain I tried to sleep. . . . I could not do anything but weep, cry out:

"Oh! Juliette! Juliette!"

My chest was burning, I felt the sensation of boiling lava swirling in my head. My thoughts were in confusion, turning into hallucinations. Along the walls of my bedroom weasels were chasing one another, jumping, abandoning themselves to obscene frolics. I was hoping that I would succumb to fever, that it would chain me to my bed, that it would cause my death. To be sick! Ah! . . yes, to be sick, long, forever! I had visions of Juliette installing herself in my room. She nursed me, she lifted my head to make me take medicine, she saw the doctor to the door, while talking to him in a low voice, and the doctor had a grave air.

"No! No! Madame, not all is lost yet. Calm yourself."

"Ah! Doctor, save him, save my Jean!"

"Only you can save him, because it is on account of you that he is dying!"

"Ah! What can I do? . . . Tell me, doctor, please!"

"You must love him, you must be good to him."

And Juliette threw herself into the arms of the physician:

"No! It's you I love! . . . Come!"

She dragged him, clinging to his lips. . and in the bedroom they danced and jumped to the ceiling and fell on my bed, enlaced.

"Die, my Jean, please die! Ah! Why does it take you so long to die?"

I fell into a slumber. When I awoke it was broad daylight. Buses were again rolling on the street, hawkers were screaming out their morning yells; I heard the scratching of a broom sweeping against my door in the hallway where people were passing.

I went out, and proceeded in the direction of the

Rue de Balzac. As a matter of fact I had no other intention than to see Juliette's house, to look into its windows and perhaps come across Celestine or Mother Souchard. . . . More than twenty times I passed back and forth on the sidewalk, in front of it. The windows of the dining room were open, and I could see the copper plates which were shining in the shadow. A rug was hanging from the balcony. The windows of the bedroom were closed. What was there behind these closed shutters, behind this white impenetrable wall? A disarranged, untidy bed, the heavy odor of carnal passion, and two outstretched bodies asleep. The body of Juliette. . . and who else? The body of Mr. Everybody. . . . A body that Juliette had picked up casually under a cabaret table or on the street! They were asleep, sated with lust! The caretaker came to shake the rug on the sidewalk. I walked away, for ever since I had left the apartment I avoided the mocking glance of this old woman, I blushed every time my eyes met hers, bulging and vicious, seeming to jeer at my misfortune. . . . When she was finished I returned to the place and stood there for a long time to fret against this wall behind which something horrible was going on and which guarded the cruel mystery of a sphinx crouched upon the sky. Suddenly, as if struck by thunder, a mad fury shook me from head to foot and, without realizing what I was going to do, without even thinking of it, I entered the house, went up the stairway and rang at Juliette's door. It was Mother Souchard who opened the door for me.

"Tell Madame," I shouted, "tell Madame that I want to see her immediately, I want to speak to her. Also tell her that if she does not come out I'll go and find her myself, I'll drag her out of her bed, do you hear! Tell her. . . ."

Mother Souchard, pale and trembling, stammered out:

"Why, my poor Monsieur Mintié, Madame isn't in there. Madame has not come back. . . ."

"Take care, you old sorceress! Don't try to make a fool out of me! And do as I tell you or I'll kill and smash everybody and everything — Juliette, you, the furniture, the house."

The old servant raised her arms to the ceiling in bewilderment.

"I swear to you by the Lord! She has not come back yet, Monsieur Mintié! Go into her bedroom and see for yourself! I am telling you!"

In two bounds I was in the bedroom. . . the bedroom was empty. . . the bed had not been touched. Mother Souchard followed every step I made, repeating:

"See, Monsieur Mintié! See! Because you are no longer together. At this hour! . . ."

I passed into the dressing room. Everything was in order just as it had been when we used to come home late at night. Juliette's things were lying on the sofa, a boiler full of water was on the gas stove.

"And where is she?" I asked.

"Ah! Monsieur," Mother Souchard replied, "does anybody know where Madame goes? There was a man here this morning who looked like some kind of a valet and spoke to Celestine, and then Celestine went out taking with her a change of clothes for Madame. . . . That's all I know!"

While prowling in the study I found the card which I had sent her the day before.

"Did Madame read this?"

"Probably not."

"And you don't know where she is?"

"Why, I am sure I don't know. Madame never tells me her affairs."

I went back to the bedroom, seated myself on a long couch.

"All right, Madame Souchard. I am going to wait here. And let me tell you that something funny is going to happen! Ha! Ha! In the end, you see, Mother Souchard, this thing is bound to come to a head. I have been patient long enough. I have been. . . . Well, that's enough!"

I shook my fist in the air.

"And it is going to be very funny, Mother Souchard!. . . and you'll be able to brag about having taken part in something very funny, something you'll never forget, never! You'll dream about it at night with terror, so help me God!"

"Oh! Monsieur Mintié! Monsieur Mintié," the old woman implored. "For the love of God calm yourself. Go away! You'll commit a crime as sure as I live! And what is it you are going to do, Monsieur Mintié? What are you going to do?"

At this moment, Spy, having come out of his corner, was advancing toward me, shaking his back, dancing on his hind legs like those of a spider. And I looked at Spy persistently. I was thinking that Spy was the only creature that Juliette loved, that to kill Spy would be to inflict the greatest sorrow on Juliette! The dog raised its paws toward me and tried to get on my lap. He seemed to say:

"Even if you do suffer so much, I am not to blame for it. To avenge yourself on me — so small, so feeble, so trustful, would be cowardly. And then you think she really loves me so much! I amuse her as a plaything, I serve as a distraction for her for a moment and that is all. If you kill me now she will get another little dog like me this very evening, one whom

she will call Spy as she did me and whom she will overwhelm with caresses as she did me, and nothing will be changed!"

I did not heed Spy any more than I heeded any of the voices that spoke within me whenever evil was drawing me on to commit some reprehensible deed.

Brutally, ferociously I seized the little dog by his hind legs.

"Here is what I am going to do, Mother Souchard!" I shouted. "Look!"

And hurling Spy into the air with all my force so that he turned over several times, I crashed his head against the corner of the fireplace. Blood streamed all over the looking-glass and the hangings, bits of brains stuck to the candlesticks and a torn-out eye fell on the carpet.

"What am I going to do, Mother Souchard?" I repeated, flinging the cadaver into the middle of the bed upon which a pool of blood appeared. "What am I going to do? Ha, Ha! You see this blood, this eye, these brains, this cadaver, this bed! Ha, Ha! Well, that's what I am going to do to Juliette, Mother Souchard! That's what I am going to do to Juliette, do you hear me, you old drunkard!"

"Ah! for the life of me!" Mother Souchard stammered out, terrified. For the life of the good Lord, I. . . ."

She did not finish. With bulging eyes, her mouth wide open and distorted into a horrible grimace, she was staring at the black body on the bed and at the blood absorbed by the bed clothes, the red stain on which was becoming purple and larger.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN I regained my senses, the killing of Spy appeared to me a monstrous crime. I was as horrified as if I had killed a child. Of all the cowardly acts committed I thought that was the most cowardly and loathsome! To kill Juliette! That would have been a crime, of course, but perhaps there could be found, if not an excuse, at least a reason for that crime in the revolt of my anguish. But to kill Spy! A dog. . . a poor, inoffensive creature! Why? For no other reason than that I was a brute, that I had in me the savage and irresistible instinct of a murderer! During the war I had killed a man who was kindly, young and strong, and I had killed him just at the moment when, fascinated, with beating heart, he was rapturously watching the rising sun! I had killed him while hidden behind a tree, concealed by the shadow, like a coward! He was a Prussian? What difference does it make! He, too, was a human being, a man like myself, better than myself. Upon his life were depending the feeble lives of women and children; a portion of suffering humanity was praying for him, waiting for him; perhaps in that virile youth, in that robust body that was his, he had the germs of those superior beings for whom humanity had been living in hope? And with one shot from an idiotic, trembling gun I had destroyed all that. And now I killed a dog! . . . and killed it when it was coming toward me, when it was trying with its little paws to climb on my lap! Verily, I was an assassin! That small cadaver haunted me, I always saw that head hideously crushed, the

blood squirting all over the white clothes of the bedroom, and the bed indelibly stained with blood.

What was also tormenting was the thought that Juliette would never forgive me the loss of Spy. She would be horrified at the mere sight of me. I wrote her letters of repentance, assured her that from now on I was going to be satisfied with what little attention she might give me, that I would never again complain, that I was not going to reproach her for her behavior; my letters were so humble, so self-degrading, so vilely submissive that a person other than Juliette would feel disgusted on reading them. I sent them with a messenger whose return I would anxiously await on the corner of the Rue de Balzac.

"No answer!"

"Are you sure you did not give it to the wrong person? Did you deliver it to the party on the first floor?"

"Yes, Monsieur. The maid even said to me: 'No answer!'"

I went to her house. The door was opened only to the extent allowed by the chain lock which Juliette, fearing me, had ordered put on, since the evening of that terrible scene; and through the half-opened space I could see the mocking and cynical face of Celestine.

"Madame is not in!"

"Celestine, my good Celestine, let me in, please!"

"Madame is not in!"

"Celestine! My dear little Celestine. Let me go in and wait for her. I'll give you a lot of money."

"Madame is not in!"

"Celestine, I beg of you! Go and tell Madame that I am here, that I am all right now. . . that I am very sick. . . that I am going to die! And you shall have a hundred francs, Celestine. . . two hundred francs!"

Celestine looked at me slyly, with a mocking air,

happy to see me suffer, happy above all to see a man reduced to her own level, begging servilely to her.

"For just one minute, Celestine. I'll just look at her and go away!"

"No, no, Monsieur! She'll scold me!"

The ringing of a bell was heard. I heard the noise of it quicken.

"You see, Monsieur, she is calling me!"

"Well, now! Celestine, tell her that if she does not come to my house by six o'clock, if she does not write to me by six o'clock. . . tell her that I am going to kill myself! Six o'clock, Celestine! Don't forget now. . . tell her that I am going to kill myself!"

"All right, Monsieur!"

The door was shut behind me with the clang of a chained lock.

It occurred to me to see Gabrielle Bernier, to tell her my troubles, to ask her advice, and use her offices for a reconciliation with Juliette. Gabrielle was finishing breakfast with a friend of hers, a short, skinny woman of dark complexion, with a pointed chin like a mouse which when speaking seemed always to be nibbling at something. In a morning robe of white silk, soiled and rumpled, her hair kept from falling by a comb stuck across it on top of her head, her elbows resting on the table, Gabrielle was smoking a cigarette and sipping chartreuse from a glass.

"Why, Jean! And so you have come back?"

She showed me into her dressing room which was very untidy. At the very first words which I spoke of Juliette, she exclaimed:

"Why. . . don't you know? We have not been on speaking terms for two months since the time she beat me out of a consul, my dear, an American Consul, who paid me five thousand a month! Yes, she beat

me out of it, that skinflint did! And how about you? You have made her come down a peg lower, I hope."

"Ah! I!" I answered, "I am very unhappy! And so a consul is her lover now!"

Gabrielle relit her extinguished cigarette and shrugged her shoulders.

"Her lover! Do you think women like that can keep a lover! She could not keep the Lord himself, my dear! Ah, men don't stick to her very long, I tell you. They come one day and then the next they pitch camp somewhere else. Well, thanks very much! It's all right to fleece them but you must do it with your gloves on, don't you think? And you are still in love with her, poor boy."

"Still — why I am more so than ever! I have done everything to cure myself of this shameful infatuation which makes me the lowest of men, which kills me, but I can't. Well now, she is leading a loathsome life, isn't she?"

"Ah! Well. . . that's true," Gabrielle exclaimed, blowing a cloud of smoke in the air. "You know that I myself don't play the prude. I am enjoying myself just like everybody else. . . but honestly. . . I can swear. . . . I'd feel ashamed to do what she does!"

With head turned, she was emitting coils of smoke which rose tremblingly toward the ceiling. And to emphasize what she had just said:

"That's the truth I am telling you," she repeated.

Although I suffered cruelly, although every word of Gabrielle cut my heart as with a knife, I came up to her and coaxingly:

"Come, my little Gabrielle," I begged her, "tell me all about her!"

"Tell you! . . tell you! Wait now! You know the two Borgsheim brothers. . . those two dirty Germans! Well, Juliette was with both of them at the

same time. I saw that myself, you know! At the same time, mind you, my dear! One night she said to one of them: 'Ah well! It is you that I love!' And she led him away. The next day she said to the other: 'No, it is positively you!' And she led him away. And you should have seen them! Two wretched Prussians who haggled over the bill! And a lot of other things. But I don't want to tell you anything because I see I hurt you."

"No!" I exclaimed, "no, Gabrielle, go on, because. . . . you understand. After all the disgust. . . the disgust. . . ."

I was choking. I burst into sobs.

Gabrielle was trying to console me.

"Come! Come now. . . . Poor Jean! Don't cry! She does not deserve all this grief! Such a nice boy as you are! I can't see how that is possible! I always used to tell her: 'You don't understand him, my dear, you never did understand him, a man like that is a jewel!' Ah! I know some women who would be mighty glad to have a man like you. . . and who would love you very much!"

She sat down on my lap and wanted to dry the tears from my eyes. Her voice became soft and her eyes luminous:

"Have a little courage. Cut loose from her! Get another one, one who is kind and gentle, one who would understand you. Can't you see?"

And suddenly, she threw her arms around me and fastened her mouth upon my own. Her bare breast which rolled out from under the lace of her peignoir was pressing against my chest. This kiss, this exposed portion of her body horrified me. I freed myself from her embrace, I rudely pushed Gabrielle away, she straightened up again somewhat abashed, fixed her dress and said to me:

"Yes, I understand! I have had the same feeling. But, you know, dear. Whenever you want to. . . come to see me."

I left. My legs were shaking, around my head I felt rings of lead; a cold sweat covered my face and rolled in titillating drops down my back. In order to walk I had to hold on to the house walls, as I was on the verge of fainting. I walked into a café and avidly gulped down a few draughts of rum. I could not say that I suffered much. It was a sort of stupor that rendered my members inactive, a kind of physical and mental prostration in which from time to time the thought of Juliette brought with it the sensation of a sharp, lancinating odor. And in my disordered mind Juliette was losing her identity; it was no longer a woman who had an individual existence that I saw, it was prostitution itself with its immense, outstretched body covering the entire world; it was lust personified, eternally defiled, toward which panting multitudes were rushing across the shadow of woeful nights, pierced by torches carried by monstrous idols. . . . I remained there a long time, my elbows on the table, my head buried in my hands, with gaze fixed between two mirrors upon a panel on which flowers were painted.

At last I left the café and walked and walked ahead, without knowing where I was going. After a long course and without the least intention of getting there, I found myself in the Avenue Bois-de-Boulogne, near the Arc de Triomphe. The sun was beginning to set. Above the hills of Saint Cloud which took on a violet tinge, the sky was a glorious purple, and little pink clouds were wandering upon the pallid blue expanse. The woods stood out as a solid mass, grown darker, a fine dust reddened by the reflection of a setting sun rose from the avenue

black with carriages. And the dense mass of carriages, congested into interminable lines, were passing without end, carrying human birds of prey to nocturnal carnages. Reclining on their cushions, indolent and disdainful, with stupid countenances and flabby flesh, exhaling a putrid odor, they were all there, so nearly alike that I recognized Juliette in each one of them. The line of vehicles appeared to me more lugubrious than ever. As I looked at these horses, this diversity of colors, this crimson sun which made the glass panes of the carriages shine like breastplates, all this intense intermingling of colors — red, yellow, blue — all these plumes that swayed in the wind, I had the impression of looking at some enemy regiments, regiments of an army of conquest ready to fall upon vanquished foes, drunk foes, drunk with a desire for pillage. And quite seriously I was indignant over the fact that I did not hear the roar of cannons, did not hear the mitrailleuses spitting death and sweeping the avenue with fire. A laborer who was returning from work stopped at the end of the sidewalk. With tools on his shoulder and crooked back, he was watching the street. Not only did he have no hatred in his eyes but there was a sort of ecstasy in them. Anger seized me. I wanted to come up to him, grab him by the collar and cry out:

"What are you doing here, you fool? Why do you look at these women so? These women who are an insult to your torn coat, to your arms trembling with fatigue, to your whole wretched body emaciated by daily hardships! In the days of revolution you thought you could avenge yourself upon society which kept you down by killing soldiers and priests, humble and suffering human beings like yourself? And you never thought of erecting scaffolds for these infamous creatures, for these ferocious beasts who steal from you

your bread, your sun. Look! Society which is so cruel to you, which tries to make ever heavier the chains that hold you riveted to eternal misery, that society offers them protection and riches; the drops of your blood it transforms into gold with which to cover the flabby bosoms of these despicable creatures. It is in order that they may live in palaces that you are spending your strength, that you are dying from hunger or that they break your head on the barricades. Look! When you beg for bread on the streets the police beat you with clubs, you poor wretch! But see how they make way for their coachmen and horses! Look! What a juicy grape-gathering they have! Ah! these vintage tubs of blood! And how on earth can the pure wheat grow tall and nourishing in the soil where these creatures rot!"

Suddenly I saw Juliette. I saw her for a second, in profile. She wore a pink hat, looked fresh, was smiling; she seemed happy. Answering greetings with a slow motion of her head, Juliette did not see me. . . . She passed on.

She is going to my house! She has come back to her senses. She is going to my house!

I was sure of it. An empty carriage passed by. I went in. Juliette had disappeared.

"If I could only get there at the same time she does. For I know she is going to my house! Hurry up, driver, hurry up!"

There is no carriage in front of the door of the furnished house. Juliette is already gone. I rushed down to the caretaker.

"Was there someone here a minute ago asking about me? Was it a lady? Mme. Juliette Roux?"

"Why no, Monsieur Mintié."

"Well, is there a letter for me?"

"Nothing, Monsieur Mintié."

I was thinking:

"She'll be here in a minute!"

I waited. No one came! I continued waiting. Nobody came! Time passed. And still no one came!

"The contemptible creature! And she was still smiling! And she looked gay! And she knew that I was going to kill myself at six o'clock!"

I ran to the Rue de Balzac. Celestine assured me that Madame had just gone out.

"Listen, Celestine, you are a nice girl. I like you very much. Do you know where she is? Go and find her and tell her that I want to see her."

"But I don't know where Madame is."

"Yes, you do, Celestine. I implore you. Please go! I suffer so!"

"Upon my word of honor! Monsieur, I don't know where she is."

I insisted:

"Perhaps she is at her lover's? At the restaurant. Oh, tell me where she is! . . ."

"But I don't know!"

I was getting impatient.

"Celestine, I have been trying to be nice to you. Don't make me lose my temper. . . because. . . ."

Celestine crossed her arms, shook her head and in the drawling voice of a blackguard:

"Because what? Oh, I am getting tired of you, you miserable wretch, you! And if you don't betake yourself from here in a hurry, I am going to call the police, do you hear?"

And pushing me rudely toward the door she added:

"Yes, I mean it! These sluts here are worse than dogs!"

I had sense enough not to start a quarrel with Celestine and, burning with shame, I went down the stairway.

It was midnight when I returned to the Rue de Balzac. I had gone through several restaurants, my eyes seeking Juliette in the mirrors, through curtain openings. I had gone into a few theatres. At the Hippodrome where she used to go on subscription days I had made a search of the stalls. This large place, with its dazzling lights, above all, this orchestra which played a slow and languid air — all this had unstrung my nerves and made me cry! I had approached groups of men, thinking that they might be talking about Juliette and that I might perhaps learn something. And every time I saw a man dressed in evening clothes, I had said to myself:

"Perhaps that's her lover!"

What was I doing here? It seemed it was my fate to run after her everywhere, always, to live on the sidewalk, at the door of evil places and wait for Juliette! Exhausted with fatigue, a buzzing sensation in my head, unable to find a trace of Juliette, I had found myself on the street again. And I was waiting! For what? Really, I did not know. I was waiting for everything and nothing at the same time. I was there either to bring myself as a voluntary offering once more or to commit some crime. I was hoping that Juliette would come home alone. Then I thought I would go up to her and move her to pity with my words. I was also afraid I might see her in the company of a man. Then I would perhaps kill her. But I was not premeditating anything. I had simply come here, that's all! To surpise her all the better, I hid myself in the shadow of the door of the house next to her own.

From there I could observe everything without being seen, if it were necessary not to show myself. I did not have to wait very long. A hackney coach coming from Faubourg Saint Honoré, passed into the

Rue de Balzac, crossed the street diagonally to the side where I was standing and, grazing the sidewalk, stopped in front of Juliette's house! I held my breath. My whole body trembled, shaken by convulsions. Juliette came out first. I recognized her at once. She ran across the sidewalk and I heard her pull the handle of the door bell. Then a man came out; it seemed to me that I knew the man also. He came to the lamp post, searched in his pocketbook and awkwardly took out a few silver pieces which he examined by the light with upraised arm. And his shadow upon the ground assumed an angular and monstrous form! I wanted to rush out of my place of hiding. Something heavy held me nailed to the ground. I wanted to shout. The cry was throttled in my throat. At the same time a chill rose from my heart to my brains. I had a feeling as though life were slowly leaving my body. I made a superhuman effort and with tottering steps I went toward the man. The door was opened and Juliette disappeared through it, saying:

"Well, are you coming?"

The man was still searching in his pocketbook.

It was Lirat! Had the houses, the very sky crashed upon my head my astonishment would have been no greater! Lirat going home with Juliette. That could not be! I had lost my senses! I came still closer.

"Lirat!" I cried out, "Lirat! . . ."

He had paid the coachman and looked at me, terrified! Motionless, with gaping mouth, with outspread legs he was looking at me, without saying a word!

"Lirat! Is that you? It is not possible! It is not you, is it? You look like Lirat but you are not Lirat!"

Lirat was silent. . . .

"Come, Lirat! You are not going to do that. . . or I shall say that you have sent me away to Ploch in order to steal Juliette from me! You here, with her!

Why that's preposterous! Lirat! Remember what you told me about her. . . think of the beautiful things which you had planted in my soul. This despicable woman! Why she is good only for one like me who am lost. But you! You are an honorable man, you are a great artist! Is it to revenge yourself on me that you are doing this? A man like you does not revenge himself in such a manner! He does not besmirch himself! If I did not come to see you it was because I feared to incur your anger! Come, speak to me, Lirat. Answer me!"

Lirat was silent. Juliette was calling him in the hallway:

"Well, are you coming?"

I seized Lirat's hands:

"Look here Lirat. . . she is mocking you. Don't you understand it? One day she said to me: 'I shall revenge myself on Lirat for his contempt, for his arrogant harshness! And that will be a farce!' She is having that revenge now. You are going into her house, aren't you. . . and tomorrow, tonight, this very minute, perhaps, she will chase you out in disgrace! Yes, that is what she is after, I can swear! Ah! Now I understand it all! She has pursued you! Foolish as she is, infinitely inferior to you as she is, she has known how to turn your head. She has a genius for evil, and you are chaste in body and mind! She has poured poison into your veins. But you are strong! You can't do this after all that has taken place between us. . . . or else you are a depraved man, a dirty pig, you whom I admire! You are a dirty pig! Come now!"

Lirat suddenly wriggled out of my hold, and, pushing me away with his two clenched fists:

"Well, yes!" he shouted, "I am a dirty pig! Leave me alone!"

A dull noise was heard which resounded in the air like a thunderbolt. It was the door shut after Lirat. The houses, the sky, the lights of the street were in a whirl. And I no longer saw anything. I stretched out my arms in front of me and fell on the sidewalk. Then in the midst of peaceful cornfields I saw a road, a white road upon which a man, seemingly tired, was walking. The man never stopped looking at the beautiful corn which ripened in the sun, and at the broad meadows where flocks of gamboling sheep grazed, their snouts buried in the grass. Apple-trees stretched out to him their branches weighted down with the purple fruit, and the springs purled at the bottom of their moss-covered recesses in the ground. He seated himself upon the bank of a river covered at this spot with little fragrant flowers, and listened rapturously to the music of nature. . . . From everywhere voices which rose up from the earth, voices which came down from heaven, soft voices were murmuring: "Come to me all ye who suffer, all ye who have sinned. We are the comforters who will restore to wretched people their repose of life and their peace of conscience. Come to us all ye who wish to live!" And the man with arms uplifted to heaven prayed: "Yes, I wish to live! What must I do in order not to suffer? What must I do in order not to sin?" The trees shook their crowns, the corn field moved its sea of stubble, a buzzing arose from every grass blade, the flowers swayed their little corollas on top of their stems, and from all this a unique voice was heard: "Love us!" said the voice. The man resumed his walk, birds were fluttering all around him.

The next day I bought a suit of working clothes.

"And so Monsieur is going away!" asked the errand boy of the premises to whom I had just given my old clothes.

"Yes, my friend!"

"And where is Monsieur going?"

"I don't know."

On the street, men appeared to me like mad ghosts, old skeletons out of joint, whose bones, badly strung together, were falling to the pavement with a strange noise. I saw the necks turning on top of broken spinal columns, hanging upon disjointed clavicles, arms sundered from the trunks, the trunks themselves losing their shape. And all these scraps of human bodies, stripped of their flesh by death, were rushing upon one another, forever spurred on by a homicidal fever, forever driven by pleasure, and they were fighting over foul carrion.

TYPOGRAPHY AND PRINTING BY
THE ULLMAN PRESS, INC., N. Y.

UNIV OF CALIFOR LIBRARY

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1388
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

NON-RENEWABLE

FEB 24 1992

UCLA/CHHS

DUE 2 WKS FROM DATE RECEIVED

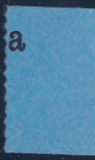
MAR 10 1992

UCLA-College Library
PQ 2364 M7C13E
L 005 729 907 5

Library

PQ
2364
M7C13E

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 001 147 412 9


a